THE INLANDER



HARRISON ROBERTSON

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BY

HARRISON ROBERTSON

AUTHOR OF

"IF I WERE A MAN," "RED BLOOD AND BLUE," ETC.



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I

FIRST FLIGHT OF A "SQUAB"

"IT was just like you, Polly!" was the grinning comment of Barney Carruthers afterwards, as Paul Rodman told him of the Glorious Girl on the train. "I could have sworn that when you started out in the world you would n't have gone twenty miles before putting on your funeral face and holding your breath in long-distance worship of some bolt of calico."

Barney Carruthers sometimes called him Paul and sometimes Rod; it was only when Paul was discussing Girls, and Woman, and Womanhood that Barney addressed him as Polly, — which, after all, was not a remote diminutive of Paul, considering Barney's propensity to carom over his diphthongs.

But Barney was wide of the mark in one respect. Paul *had* gone twenty miles before he put on his funeral face and held his breath at sight of the Glorious Girl. She did not get

on the train until it was pulling out from Nashville, and Paul had travelled more than forty miles before he reached Nashville.

He was twenty-two, and he was literally, as Barney Carruthers expressed it, starting out in the world. The death of his father, Judge Sevier Rodman, a year before, had left Paul the last of an old family. He had tried running the farm one season, but he longed to be where the tide of life was strong, and the pastoral country around the inland town of Mavistoc, in Middle Tennessee, which had thus far limited his horizon, beautiful as it was and much as he loved it, could not satisfy that longing.

While his father lived Paul had not been impatient to leave the old homestead. The disparity in their ages did not prevent the closest companionship between the scholarly recluse and his young son, who were the sole white members of the household. The boy entered with zest into the pursuits and studies of the man. They passed the days together, with guns or fishing-rods; the evenings they usually shared, sitting on the veranda in summer and around the library table in winter. The education of his son was the chief employ-

ment of Judge Rodman's later years; and it was an education which, with the relaxation the two took together, left neither with more idle time than it was meet should fall to those whose lots were cast on this benign soil and in this gentle climate. Moreover, it was an education, Paul subsequently found, which he had no reason to be ashamed of in any circle of college men.

Having sold the farm, after reserving the books, the piano, and a few of the pictures for himself, young Rodman, with $3,700 to his credit, with a sound body and a clean heart, had taken the northbound train this morning, on a journey that was to bear him to what he would have called, in the language of his books, "the battlefield of life."

It was such a journey as none ever knows but once. Insulated as Paul had always been; sanguine and imaginative; feeding his imagination on his seclusion and on a library stored with the poetry and romance of the past; full of dreams which were now to find their fruition, — he was at last thundering on his way to the outer world and the new existence. There was an exhilaration in the rattle of the wheels and the throb of the engine that told him his

beginning had actually begun. The glistening rails did not reel out behind him as swiftly as he was leaving the old life.

His eyes were constantly out of the car window. Every scene along the road had a vivid interest for him, — the little way-stations, the straggling spectators, a town, a river, the tree-grown forts, and the well-kept cemetery that told of the great battle fought before he was born; then Nashville, and the Girl!

She came into the car as if she had just stepped out of one of Paul's books, and the porter gave her a chair not very far in front of Paul's, in which she settled herself, with her bags and bundles finally stowed to her satisfaction. Then she lifted one exquisite hand to her collar, and again to the coil of her hair, sweeping the car with a serene, surveying glance, during which Paul caught the color of her eyes; whereupon his "funeral face" came to him, and he sat very still, and looked through the window no more.

Paul knew little about women, though he thought he knew everything about them. Certainly he had his own ideas about Woman; and they were ideas which that fine old Southern gentleman, Judge Sevier Rodman, would

have heartily approved as part of the capital of his son as the boy went forth to make his place as a man.

Those ideas of Paul's were deeply rooted, if not very definite, at an early age. He had contemplated the sex with wonder and awe, merging into admiration and reverence. From whatever sources his boyhood's impressions had been derived, however, it was not from intimate association with women themselves. His mother had died within six months after his birth; he had no sisters; and he never thought of his old black nurse as a woman, any more than he thought of her as a butterfly. She was simply his "mammy," as far removed in kind and degree from the beautiful beings he knew as "ladies" as they were removed from all other created things. Indeed, ladies, as he conceived them, belonged to a world altogether different from the little one in which he lived. It would have been a strange wonder-tale to the child if he had been told that woman is only a sort of man, — or, if preferred, that man is only a sort of woman. And when the revelation did burst upon him that "ladies" have two legs, "just like men," his mental organism underwent some such wrench-

ing and rearrangement as accompanied the ignoble transition of Dr. Jekyll into Mr. Hyde.

Up to that time a suspicion of the fact that so supernal a creature as a lady was hampered by the material necessity of walking with legs, like common men, had never entered his brain. The flowing folds of a woman's draperies had always been to him as essentially a part of herself as the white robes and feathered wings of the celestial pictures in the family Bible were parts of the angels themselves. If before he had eaten of the tree of knowledge he had been informed that ladies propel themselves, like men, by poking one prong of themselves out before the other prong of themselves, he would have been as incredulous as the lover of the thoroughbred is when first asked to believe that the grotesquely awkward movements caught by instantaneous photography represent the running action of that graceful animal. Women in motion no more suggested to young Rodman the act of walking than did the floating of a swan or the flight of a swallow.

And so when his father took him to the circus one day, and something called "Mlle. Caromba," clad in conspicuously scant gauze, toddled out into the ring and jumped upon

the bare back of a spotted horse, and when his father, in response to his inquiries, told him that it was a woman, and finally convinced him that it did not belong to the menagerie, and had not been captured in some strange land along with the camels and the kangaroos, but was exactly like other women, except in the merely artificial adjunct of raiment, the lad learned the first of those lessons that make him the subject of this bit of biography.

The girl in the car sat with her back turned to Paul, and he had to content himself with a view of the graceful contour of one shoulder and cheek. She was reading a book, and after the one glance she had given her fellow-passengers she seemed oblivious of their existence. Paul's desire for a better look at her grew stronger the more it was denied, and he was seriously debating whether he could, without attracting her notice, change his seat to one of the revolving chairs in front of her, when she closed the book and swinging her own chair partially around, fixed her eyes contemplatively on the scenery through the windows across the aisle. Paul now had his opportunity, and he studied her face intently,

furtively, as if he feared the very act of his breathing might betray to her his unmannerly scrutiny.

It was a lovely face, delicate in color and features, with the delicacy of fineness rather than of weakness. It had a light of its own, independent of the light of the wonderful eyes; a face subtly magnetic and bespeaking a gentle, pure-hearted, and warm-hearted woman.

At least, such was Paul Rodman's verdict; and who better qualified than Paul, in his youth and inexperience, to recognize a true woman on sight? The dreams of all his life had centred around such a face; and now, at last, after waiting twenty-two long years, he had found it!

He continued to gaze at her until, after a few minutes, she turned her head slightly and caught him in the act. His eyes fell precipitately, and he knew that his face was instantly aflame. He felt like a convicted culprit. She was too well bred to display any irritation, but what would she think of so bold and rude a stare? What could such a woman think?

Nevertheless he was glowing with the consciousness that he had seen her eyes again, — deep and tender eyes (what was there that he

did not know about such eyes?) which confirmed a hundredfold all that her face betokened. That consciousness overwhelmed even his sense of guilt. He must see those eyes again, — cautiously, respectfully, — but he must see them.

Glancing, after a little, toward her once more, it was with a quickening of his pulse that he saw they were levelled upon himself. She withdrew them, but hardly before he too had turned away. When next he stealthily looked at her she was engrossed in her book. Of course his insolence had offended her! The thought stirred in him a tumult of compunction and self-contempt, and it was fully five minutes before he allowed his eyes to venture in forbidden territory again.

She was still occupied with the book; but it was not long before a swift glance came to him over the top of it, when, closing the volume, she turned with a faint sigh to the window and drummed listlessly on the glass.

That settled it. She *was* offended by his persistent ogling; whereupon he sank again to lower depths of abasement. But he did not discontinue his transgression. He could at least look at her openly, now that her back was toward him.

Presently, as if moved by a sudden caprice, she began fumbling at the window, with the evident purpose of raising it. But perhaps she did not understand the catch; something seemed to resist her efforts.

"I ought to offer my assistance," thought Mr. Paul Rodman. "If I had not already provoked her! But a gentleman can't stand back at such a time. I'll lift the window for her and then I'll go into the smoker, and I'll be hanged if I annoy her with another look while she remains on the — oh, thunder!"

A benevolent-faced old gentleman, sitting behind Paul, had walked over and raised the refractory sash. He was rewarded with the sweetest of smiles and the sweetest of "Thank you's;" and as he returned to his seat he cast a quizzical glance at Paul, who, however, did not understand it, if he saw it. The truth is, that young voyager into the outer world was now thoroughly dejected, and drawing his coat more closely around him, as if to commune with his adversity, as the Spartans communed with their secret foxes, he was about to contract into the gloomy depths of his chair, when his impulse was arrested with almost a jerk by the spectacle of a man with a dyed mustache

who projected himself suddenly into Paul's field of vision.

This man might have been any age from forty to sixty, and his figure was not yet too rotund to show that he had once been handsome, though his face was now the well-marked battleground of the forces of vitality and decay. Between the deadness of his dyed mustache and dyed hair his eyes still burned with living fire, and though his complexion was the dull red whose dulness is accentuated by dyed hair, the upper part of his visage and head was symmetrical and even imposing. It was the deep lines that fell away on either side from the base of his nose that etched the jowls of swine. He was well dressed, except for the porcelain glaze on his linen and the flare of gaudy handkerchief from an outside breast-pocket of his coat.

It was plain that he had moved from some other part of the car for a purpose, and the purpose soon was equally plain. The chair which he chose was directly in front of the girl, not ten feet away, and he swung it around to face her, staring at her with bold, and what was evidently intended to be ingratiating, admiration. Soon a smile glinted in his eyes,

then twitched his mouth, and a little later the handkerchief was flirted from his pocket and passed significantly over his lips.

Paul was inwardly seething. His fingers gripped to be at the fellow's throat, and his teeth were clinched in the restraint he had forced upon himself. He glanced at the girl, but her back was toward him. He thought the cheek which he could see partially was flushed, and he inferred from her attitude that she was looking studiously out of the window.

Just then the train slowed to a stop at a station, amid a clamorous din of "Peaches! peaches! Here's your fresh soft peaches, six for a nickel!" It seemed to bring an inspiration to the man with the dyed mustache, who smiled broadly and hurried from the car, with a look on his face which proclaimed loudly that his next move would be a fruit-offering to the girl.

Paul got up and sauntered to the door through which the man had disappeared. Stepping out to the platform of the car, he closed the door behind him and breathed the air of freedom once more. The man he had followed was on the ground among the boys, who crowded around him, pressing on him their

bargains. In half a minute more the train started and the man was on the steps of the coach, with both hands full of peaches.

Paul, standing with his back to the car door, quietly looking at him, made no motion to allow him to pass.

"Open the door for me, my young friend; you see I've got all I can 'tend to."

The man, who was on a level with Paul now, spoke a little hurriedly and in a good-humored tone that took compliance for granted.

It was a way of Paul's that when he was in communication with one who had aroused his anger he smiled winningly — up to a certain point. He was smiling now as the man with the peaches halted before him.

"You have made a mistake," Paul said gently; "your car must be further to the front."

"No, I ain't made no mistake," laughing shortly and impatiently; "what do you take me for, bubby?"

He started forward, as if to push by Paul, but Paul was not to be pushed aside.

"I am quite sure you have, sir; this car is intended for ladies and gentlemen."

The man's eyebrows wrinkled nearer together

as he screwed his sharp gaze on Paul, and he dropped one of his peaches as he spoke.

"Say, you, what the devil are you drivin' at? I ain't got no time to stand out here and joke with you."

"If you insist on an explanation," Paul smiled, "you may remember that there are some ladies in this car, and I have seen enough to know that your place is not with ladies."

The man's face grew a deeper red and he opened his mouth to speak, but he seemed checked by astonishment. Then he broke into a harsh laugh, which he ended abruptly.

"Say, you young squab you," he spoke with gruff directness, "what part of the world did you come from, and when did you fall out of your loft? Get out of my way; I'm done foolin' with you."

He began in an excited haste to stuff the peaches in his pockets, and Paul, watching him, smiled and made no answer.

"My place not with ladies, hey? Huh! ain't you been out of your nest long enough to find out a man's place is with any lady he damn pleases, if the lady don't object?"

Paul was not smiling now. He suddenly

reached up to the rope and signalled the train to stop.

The man did not seem to suspect Paul's purpose. "You young softy!" he said, "are you goin' to get off and walk because you don't like my society?"

He understood as the train slackened and Paul took him by the collar.

The man, with a realizing oath, grappled Paul, but he was no match for this strong youth from the country.

Paul quickly lifted him from the car and dumped him on the edge of the clay embankment, down which he rolled five or six feet, midst spluttering profanity, a hat gone astray, and those peaches that were not mashed in his pockets frisking away in various directions to liberty.

Paul, turning to the rope to start the train, was confronted by the agitated conductor.

"What's the matter?" hurriedly asked that official. "Who pulled that rope?"

"I did," Paul answered. "One of the passengers had to get off."

"What are you talking about? What is the trouble?" demanded the conductor.

The man below had got to his feet and

scrambled up the embankment, divided between his desires to express his indignation and to brush some of the traces of yellow clay and crushed peaches from his clothes. He glared at Paul and shook his fist at him, but he spoke to the conductor.

"You! here, you!" he panted, "I'll make this cost your road a hundred thousand! What are you here for, anyhow? Are you runnin' a railroad train or a lunatic asylum? I'll — I'll — "

There was a peroration of profanity which it is not worth while to record, but he took the hand of the conductor and was helped up the car steps, still glaring at Paul.

"I want to see you about this, young man," the conductor said roughly to Paul; "this is bad business, stopping a train," as he pulled the rope overhead.

"All right, sir; I am at your service," Paul replied. "But I promise not to repeat the offence. If it becomes necessary to help a passenger off again, I'll try to do it without stopping the train."

He was standing with his back to the closed door of the chair-car, and was smiling again at the man with the dyed mustache. That

individual seemed to have no further desire to re-enter the car, and Paul's threat was superfluous. The plight of the gallant's habiliments was not such as became a lady's man, and was sufficient in itself to preclude his return to the field of his proposed conquest. He indicated as much by a disgusted glance at his clothes, and then, swearing his intention to make it hot for the lunatic and the railroad, disappeared into the car ahead.

After Paul, with some difficulty, had pacified the conductor, he went back to his seat in the chair-car. The girl was deep in her book, and there was no evidence that any of his half-dozen fellow-passengers suspected his part in stopping the train a few minutes before. He was particular to note that one sitting anywhere near the girl could not have seen him as he helped from the train the man with the dyed mustache.

It was not long now till Louisville, Paul's destination, would be reached, and he spent the intervening time dreaming fine things, of which the Glorious Girl was the heroine and Paul Rodman the hero, sometimes unknown and usually unappreciated, but perhaps the more pensively happy for that.

II

"WHEN GOOD FELLOWS GET TOGETHER"

PAUL RODMAN had now been in Louisville nearly three months. When he left his boyhood's home and went forth into the world, he had chosen Louisville as that part of it in which to cast his lot simply because Barney Carruthers lived there. The two were bound by that friendship which begins only in early youth and ends only in death, and which, however many other comrades either party to it may have, admits no third to its inmost chamber.

Barney Carruthers was three or four years Paul's senior, and was as different from him in temperament as it is possible for one chum to be from another. Big-boned and loose-jointed, he looked, he said himself, as if he had "just been pitchforked together." His face was broad and only thinly covered by a beard that he called "brindle giggies," and that fortunately refused to grow more than an inch or

two; his cheek-bones were high, his complexion a freckled tan, his eyes bright and merry, his mouth wide, and usually at its widest in a laugh, — and where others would only smile Barney Carruthers would laugh. He was ungainly and lazy, except "in action," which is to say, except in physical sport or fight.

It was in a fight that the friendship between him and Paul Rodman began.

Paul was about twelve years old when, one day as he sat waiting alone in his father's buggy, across the street from the Academy campus in Mavistoc, he was discovered by Barney Carruthers. Paul had never been allowed to go to school, and saw very little of other boys, who naturally regarded him with disapproval. Barney Carruthers, having shinnied the ball past the goal, saw Paul in the buggy, watching the game with that solemn countenance which he usually assumed when intensely interested.

"Nanny-boy! Nanny-boy!" Barney sang out. "Ba-a! Run here, fellers, an' see if you can ketch it under your hat!"

A dozen of the scamps answered Barney's call, and next they were sitting a-row on the

fence, keeping time with their heels and chanting over and over, under Barney's leadership, the shrill sing-song which Barney had "made up": —

"Nanny-boy! Nanny-boy! 'rah! 'rah! 'rah!
Nanny-boy! Nanny-boy! where 's its pa!"

Pretty soon the solemn-faced Paul began to smile winningly; and then he got out of the buggy and tied the horse to the hitching-post; whereupon Barney wound up the last line of his couplet with a crescendo "It 's goin' to its pa!"

But Paul was not going anywhere. He took off his coat and threw it into the buggy, then stepping forward into the street and looking straight at Barney Carruthers, struck into the chorus with the mortal insult: —

"*School-butter! school-butter!*"

The fence was cleared as if by a flock of startled blackbirds.

"Who-wow!" yelled Barney Carruthers. "Let him alone, you fellers! He said it to me! I found him! He 's mine!"

They obeyed their leader. There was not a boy among them who did not know that to disobey would mean a personal settlement with

Barney; and the best of them had had their settlements with Barney that settled.

They were in a ring around Paul, and Barney's coat was now on the ground. He stooped over and slapped his hands in the dust, and then the two went at each other. It was fist and skull, foot and knee, no parrying or side-stepping, and every blow telling. Paul was the smaller, but he held his own so well that soon whenever he scored a point he was cheered as lustily as was Barney. For fully ten minutes it was give and take, up and down, first one on top and then the other, until labored breathing was about all that either was equal to. Finally, linked in a weak embrace, the pair reeled against the fence, and as from sheer necessity they rested for a moment, their eyes met and lingered inquiringly.

"Why don't you say 'nough, you little galoot?" panted Barney Carruthers.

"I won't unless you will, too!" was Paul Rodman's ultimatum.

"'Nough!" agreed Barney Carruthers.

"'Nough!" confirmed Paul Rodman.

After that nobody called Paul "Nanny-boy" again, and it was not long before he and Barney were such friends that Barney, owing to

the frequency with which he played hookey in order to be with Paul, was expelled from school; which resulted in the royal arrangement for the boys whereby Barney shared with Paul Judge Rodman's tutorship.

This intimacy between the two lads was uninterrupted until Barney grew up and went away to a Louisville law-school, returning to his country home in Tennessee only for his vacations, when he regaled the deeply interested Paul by the hour with narratives of his experiences as a man of the world, being especially impressive in his description of the taste of beer the first time he had "swallowed a dose of the mixture of tan-bark tea and axle-grease." Notwithstanding the beer, however, Barney on the completion of the law course decided to remain in Louisville to practise his profession, and there he was at least remaining when Paul Rodman joined him.

The two young men occupied a flat in the same building in which Drewdie Poteet had his studio. Drewdie Poteet — who signed himself Templeton Drew Poteet, but who was called by everybody Drewdie Poteet — was the son of a wealthy widow who made him such a liberal allowance that there was no necessity

for his having a studio, but for the fact that Drewdie believed that all men had Vocations in Life. The truth is, that Drewdie had, at various times, conceived that he had as many Vocations in Life. First he had been sure that his Vocation was to be a great tenor singer. Happily for the neighbors he had soon become convinced of his mistake. Then it had been revealed to him that his Vocation was to be a Napoleon of finance, and he had gone to Chicago to enter upon his empire, only to be taken in hand by some incredulous people in the neighborhood of the wheat pit and again shown his costly error. After that he had known his Vocation was to be a great sculptor; and when Paul Rodman made his acquaintance as a friend of Barney Carruthers, Drewdie was certain his Vocation was to be a great marine painter, being the more certain of this because, except for an occasional summer jaunt to New York or Atlantic City, he never saw the sea.

Drewdie Poteet was Barney Carruthers' most intimate friend in Louisville until Paul Rodman arrived. It made no difference to Drewdie how much Barney laughed at him and blackguarded him, and it made no differ-

ence to Barney how much Drewdie lectured him on his neglected obligations to the tailors and haberdashers. The two got on together perfectly, notwithstanding their dissimilarity and Drewdie's grievances against Barney that he would not go into society, and that his inveterate habit of sitting on his spine, with a pipe in his mouth, utterly frustrated Drewdie's desire to paint him as *Farragut Lashed to the Shrouds.* When Paul Rodman came, their admiration of him was another bond between Drewdie and Barney. A new acquaintance was never long in liking or disliking Paul, and Drewdie surrendered at once to the young Tennessean's unsophisticated enthusiasm, old-fashioned manners, and unconscious assumption of leadership. Barney laughed at Paul as freely as he laughed at Drewdie, but it was easy to see that behind his laughter was the greatest respect as well as affection for this hale, fresh-cheeked lad, and if Drewdie had not yielded so readily to Paul's own influence it is likely that he would almost as readily have given his allegiance to Paul through the mere force of Barney's example.

One of the first things that tended to es-

tablish Drewdie and Paul on this footing was the latter's amenability to Drewdie's efforts to extend the art of good dressing. At his country home Paul had been considered somewhat fastidious as to his personal appearance, but on reaching Louisville he had been quick to see that the cut of his hair, the length of his coat, and the width of his hat brim required some modification to adjust them to the standards which prevailed among Drewdie Poteet's associates.

"You pattern after Drewdie Poteet, Rod,' was one of Barney Carruthers' injunctions. "Drewdie is the best-dressed man you know, and I'm the worst; so you see my advice is disinterested. You've come here to make your jack, and I've always heard that a good way to do that is to dress as if you'd already made it. I'd try the scheme myself if I didn't have anything else to do."

The three had some jolly times together those first months after Paul's migration to town. In the mornings Barney Carruthers assiduously cultivated the habit of going to his law office, but Drewdie Poteet came down to his studio about ten o'clock and lolled with the papers for an hour or two, when he took

the air "on the avenue" with Paul. The three met at lunch, and again at the tail of the afternoon, when they went for long walks in the suburbs, and with such regularity that in certain portions of the city they became as well known as the "old rags" man, and so friendly with the young barbarians on the commons that sometimes it was deemed judicious to change the route when Paul had neglected to stow in his pockets the expected candy or chewing gum. Then followed dinner, and in the evenings a trolley ride, a pull on the river, or loafing in the rooms of one of the two with Barney's guitar, Paul's piano, and Drewdie's tenor; and when Sunday came, knickerbockers and wheels and away over the Kentucky country roads, or perhaps across the bridge and into the Indiana hills, among which they knew an old German who nursed a vineyard, made pure wine, and set a dinner good enough for Drewdie Poteet's fastidious palate and cheap enough for the other two's limited pockets.

But all this time Paul Rodman had not discovered what he was to do in the world into which he had come to make his way.

"You see, fellows, I'm not like Drewdie," he explained. "If I were, I'd have known

long ago what my vocation was, — maybe I 'd have known it two or three times by this. But I don't. There are dozens of things I 'd just as soon do as dozens of others, and not one that I feel called on to do above everything else. I 'm sorry it 's that way with me, Drewdie, but it is."

It was at Barney Carruthers' suggestion that Paul had decided to try the newspaper business. "I believe you 'd make a go at that," Barney had said. "You know your father was a great writer," — it was well remembered in the Mavistoc neighborhood that Judge Sevier Rodman had contributed to ante-bellum "Southern literature" some ornate essays and rhythmic lyrics, through the columns of *The Southern Literary Messenger*, — "and I don't see why you should n't have inherited his genius. I know Stagg, the city editor of the *Globe*, and I 'll see if I can't fix it for you, if you say."

Stagg agreed to give Paul a trial, and the result was thus reported to Barney and Drewdie by Paul himself: —

"I 'm not to be a great journalist, after all. Stagg and I unanimously agreed, in about two minutes, that you were mistaken, Barney.

When I got to Stagg's office I had to wait while he was sending some reporters to different parts of town for all sorts of things; and when Stagg turned to me I felt I had the advantage of those chaps, at any rate, for I had come with my piece already written up. You see, I wanted to take time to prepare something carefully, and I had the whole thing composed and copied off before I left my room this morning. There it is now, if you'd like to see it; for it won't be in the *Globe* to-morrow."

Paul took from his pocket and threw on the table a folded manuscript, which Barney reached for, and, removing his pipe from his mouth, began reading aloud: —

"'SOME QUESTIONS OF THE AGE.

"'Does Business, the Moloch of our modern Ammonites, in addition to the tribute of man's personality which it exacts, demand the sacrifice of woman's regnancy? Will it be satisfied with nothing short of the obliteration of all distinctions between the sexes? What man for the first time sees without a shock women commingling with men in the lobbies of our hotels? Who, without a callousing of his innate manhood, can look with indifference

upon the women in the city, accorded little or none of the deference that is their due, as they are forced into the struggle for existence on a common plane with men in the trade marts, stores, and factories? What man whose ideas of woman enshrine her, as they should, as the sacred spirit of home, the one object of his protection and devotion, can look, without an impulse of rebellion, upon the pathetic faces of these women, contesting with men the feverish, stubborn fight for subsistence? And looking upon these faces, many of which seem to have lost that feminine fineness which is as subtle yet as positive as the fragrance of a flower, may he not recall the Scriptural story of the infliction of toil on the human race as a punishment for the first sin, and wonder if an argument in support of that story may be built on the theory that such punishment falls so much more heavily on woman than on man because hers was deemed the greater part in that sin? In truth —'"

"Oh! you need n't read any more of it," Paul interrupted; "it 's all like that."

Barney Carruthers folded up the paper and laughed one of those laughs which sank deep in his throat and stretched his big mouth to its limits.

"Polly! Polly!" he exclaimed, "you did n't show that to Stagg, did you?"

"I did! And he read it, — part of it, anyway."

Drewdie Poteet, who at first seemed in doubt how to take these confessions of Paul's, dismissed his doubts when Barney began to laugh, and Drewdie laughed too, in his little hacking way.

"And what did Stagg say, Paul?" Drewdie asked.

"He didn't say much, but he looked lots. In fact he looked as if he wanted to do like Barney Carruthers, and swallow himself in a laugh. But he didn't. He just gave me back the paper and said that some time he might get me to write a special article for the Sunday supplement, or woman's page, or something, giving the first impressions of what he called an old-time Southerner from the interior — I reckon he meant a country jake from Tennessee — on the modern metropolitan woman; but for the present I was to make a beginning on the *Globe*, and that was not the way to begin on the *Globe*."

"I suppose he told you what was the way," Drewdie commented.

"Oh! very explicitly. He said he had saved a nice, easy assignment for me to begin

with. I was simply to go out to Mrs. Northumberland's, on Ormsby Avenue, and get her version of a rumor that she had intercepted her young daughter at the Jeffersonville Ferry one night last week in time to prevent an elopement with a pool-room sheet-writer. That was all."

"It was easy enough, was n't it?" Drewdie asked. "I've understood Mrs. Northumberland has a craze for getting into the papers."

"Stagg said something of the same kind. But I told him he'd have to let me out; on second thought, I did n't care to begin on the *Globe*. The fact is, fellows, before I'd go about insulting ladies that way I'd see the *Globe* in glory. I'll have to find another vocation, Drewdie."

"Polly," said Barney Carruthers, "what was it that masher you chucked off the train called you, — a squab?"

"He did, he did, Barney Carruthers! A squab, and not a journalist!"

"Well, he can prove you're not a journalist by Stagg," said Drewdie Poteet.

"And he can prove you're a squab by me," said Barney Carruthers, rising and going to the tobacco jar, "and what's more, a squab that

was hatched among the stars, I reckon, which will make it all the harder for you to learn to fly down in these parts. But, Polly," he added, after refilling his pipe, "there are oodles of things at large worse than a squab."

Whereupon he brought the palm of his hand down on Paul's head, in affectionate benediction, with a blow that crushed his hat over his eyes; and Paul in return knocked the pipe from Barney's mouth into the hands of Drewdie Poteet, who demanded "judgment" at short-stop.

III

PAUL RODMAN GOES INTO BUSINESS

A FEW days later, as the three were starting on one of their afternoon walks to the outskirts of the city, Paul announced that he had made up his mind not to wait any longer, and actually had "gone into business."

"When?"

"What?"

"Where?" he was bombarded by Barney Carruthers and Drewdie Poteet.

"Come on, and I'll show you."

Paul stepped buoyantly along their favorite route to the southern suburbs, the other two by his side. They were familiar figures on these streets at this hour, — Paul Rodman, lithe-limbed, sure-motioned, with either extreme gravity or extreme brilliance conspicuous in his face, and the bloom of his country boyhood yet upon it; Drewdie Poteet, dapper, immaculately clothed, marionette-gaited; Barney Carruthers, his freckled, laughter-slashed visage broadening in the joy of the

open air and of good fellowship, and his lurching sprawl the despair of his companions when they tried to keep step with him.

As they walked on toward Churchill Downs this afternoon, the first golden leaves of the autumn maples under their feet and the golden mists of the autumn sun softening the purple ridge that walled the river, Drewdie and Barney were chaffing Paul concerning the nature of the business career he had entered upon, and Barney was varying this by humming, to an air of his own, —

"Polly and Barney and Drewdie Poteet—
Oh! haven't you seen 'em parade out the street:
Polly all eyes and Drewdie all sweet,
And Barney Carruthers all mouth and feet?"

It was some doggerel that had appeared not long before in *The Runabout*, a little sheet published Sundays, on the assumption that everybody likes to read something mean about everybody else. The publication of the rhymes had been followed by a visit of Barney Carruthers to the office of *The Runabout*, with the avowed purpose of taking off his coat and editing the editor.

"There won't be any more of that sort of

thing in *The Runabout*," Barney had reported to Drewdie Poteet, after the interview with the editor, — " not if I know anything about human nature when I see it," laughing at the memory about of what he had seen.

" Why, Barney," Drewdie had replied, " I did n't suppose you were sensitive about — about those feet and things."

" Feet? Oh, go 'long! It was his freshness in the use of 'Polly' that I cautioned him against. 'Polly' is a little piece of personal property of my own, and I don't intend to have anybody else infringing on it. Do you catch on, Drewdie Poteet? "

Drewdie understood. Not even he, as well as he knew the two, would have dared call Paul Rodman " Polly " in Barney Carruthers' presence.

Away out at what was then the end of Third Street, Paul stopped before a real estate agent's " For Sale " sign stuck in a flat lot, half covered with water.

" Here it is, gentlemen," he announced.

" Here what is, mister? " said Barney Carruthers.

" My business," answered Paul, with a happy smile.

"Going into the frog business?" asked Drewdie Poteet.

"Maybe you're thinking of contracting to supply Drewdie scenes for his marines," guessed Barney Carruthers.

"The real estate business, gentlemen," proclaimed Paul; "this is my start."

"Starting for China, through a hole in the ground?" persisted Barney.

"I bought it to-day," explained Paul; "got it cheap, on account of the hole in the ground. Have n't you all noticed how fast the city is building up in this direction?"

"Going to sit down on the banks and wait for the city to build up to you? Is that what you call the real estate business, Rod?"

Barney himself sat down and began throwing stones into the water.

"It's a beginning," Paul answered. "It won't be long before there is a cosy little home — maybe a palatial one — where that puddle is now. Is there any finer business in the world than one that helps to make homes?"

"Spoken like Polly, dealer in pollywogs. Heave-ho, there, Drewdie Poteet, and help me fill up the pond. We must lend a

hand to Polly in his business of building homes."

Paul, however, sold his lot at a slight loss before a month had passed.

It was the bicycles that led to this, and showed him the way to the business which he was to follow with some success and much delight.

They were returning from a country run one evening, and struck the western edge of Louisville after dark. Barney's tire had picked up a thorn, and all three stopped while he repaired the puncture. As Paul waited, his curiosity was awakened by the unusual activity at the nearest of the few scattered cottages in the vicinity. Accurately speaking, it was hardly more than the frame of a cottage, which was evidently in course of construction. A little girl was holding a kerosene lamp, a man was sawing lumber, and a woman was driving nails into weatherboarding. Paul walked over to the place while Barney was fixing his tire and Drewdie was volunteering all sorts of advice how to do it.

When Barney had finished and called to Paul, that young man returned with a note of excitement in his voice.

"What do you suppose they're doing over there?" he said. "It's a family building a house. They are very poor, and they have never had a house of their own. The man's name is Slade, and he gets a dollar a day at some sort of common labor, when he is able to work, — he is n't in good health, — and they live on that and have saved up enough to begin a little house. At first they lived in a shanty-boat, which Slade built down on the river, but one day a member of the Boat Club came along and took such a fancy to it that he gave Slade $140 for it, and now uses it as a house-boat. The $140 went into that little dab of ground over there, and a shed was put up, which the family occupy until they can get a room or two of the house ready. They are building the house themselves. They buy the material, a little at a time, out of the savings of $1 a day. The man saws the lumber and places the heavy timbers in position before he starts for his job in the morning, and the woman does the lighter work with the hammer, as she can find time, during the day. After supper they work on it till bedtime, — that's what they are doing now. They've been all the spring and summer on it, and

they 're anxious to move in before winter. What 's bothering them most now is the roof. They 've set their hearts on a tin roof; it will cost them $10, and they can't possibly save up $10 before winter. I say, boys, it 's fine! it 's beautiful! Only it 's an infernal shame that the woman should have to do it, and — anyway, we 've got to organize a pool, Barney Carruthers and Drewdie Poteet, to float that tin-roof scheme!"

Barney began to twit Paul derisively, and Drewdie tried to make a pun about tin, but Paul had removed the lamp from his wheel and was off with it to the house-builders.

"What 's he up to now?" asked Drewdie Poteet.

"If I don't believe the cuss is going to give them his bicycle lamp!" responded Barney Carruthers.

"Not on your life. Anything but that!"

But it was that, notwithstanding the fact that Paul Rodman, after experimenting with many makes of lamps, had finally found one which, with some alterations of his own, he claimed to be the only bicycle lamp in the world, and which had come to be such a hobby with him that he was rated by his friends as a crank on

the subject. He had set it on a pile of lumber, and in the big disk of its brilliant light the skeleton of the house stood out clearly.

"That beats all the kerosene lamps in the West End, does n't she?" Paul exclaimed, as he returned and sprang on his wheel.

"And how do you expect to beat the police, riding back without her?" asked Barney Carruthers.

"I 'll risk it, and run for it, if it comes to that," was Paul's reply, looking over his shoulder at the illuminated scene of activity behind him.

Next afternoon there was no walk by the trio.

"We are to get an early dinner," Paul demurred; "then into our wheel togs. I've a new excursion on hand, — something better than anything we 've struck yet."

There was not much objection to this. There never was to Paul's proposals. Ridicule him as Barney Carruthers might, and cavil as Drewdie Poteet did, Paul invariably had his way, for it invariably ended in their following his unconscious leadership.

This evening he led them to the West End again, over the same route they had ridden the night before.

"Going to stop by Slade's for that precious lamp of yours, Rod?" Barney Carruthers called out, as they neared the house-builders.

"Maybe he's going to leave them that tin roof," Drewdie Poteet suggested.

Paul did stop when they reached the place. "Come on in here, boys," he cried; "you would n't like to miss what I 've got to show you."

The others, being on wheels, had to get off or leave Paul, and, as already intimated, they were not in the habit of leaving him. They did as he directed in this instance, and Paul, after a warm but quiet greeting by the little family, presented his friends.

"I've brought you some hands," he said to Slade. "We 're green, but we can learn; and between us we can certainly get the house finished before cold weather. Fall in, fellows."

He threw off his coat and took a plank out of the arms of the astonished Mrs. Slade.

Barney Carruthers was dumb for five seconds. Then there was a vast chasm in his countenance and a mighty inrushing laugh. Jerking off his coat, and swinging it around his head, he dashed it forcibly on that

of Paul, and demanded to be shown what to do.

Drewdie Poteet seemed lost in hesitation or amazement. He stood with his mouth half open, staring at everybody. Paul, swinging around the plank he held, struck Drewdie between the shoulder-blades and nearly swept him off his feet.

"Get to work there, Drewdie Poteet," he laughed, "or get out of the way of busy folks."

"Be careful with Drewdie Poteet, Paul Rodman!" sang out Barney Carruthers, who had seized a scantling. "He'll come in strong when we go to put on the paint."

Thus it began, and thus it continued. Boss Rodman took his "gang" to work regularly. For the time the long walks and the long bicycle runs gave way to a different form of exercise. And one night in November, when the early darkness had settled down like the leaden sky itself, when the first spit of snow was in the air and the first aureoles radiated from the street-lights, the little house was completed, even to the tin roof and the paint, the little family had moved in, and as Paul and Barney and Drewdie opened the new gate and

went up the new brick walk, it was toward what Paul then and there proclaimed the cheeriest sight to be seen in the winter darkness, — windows glowing and blinking with firelight and lamplight within.

Paul had insisted that the completion of their labors and the occupancy of the new house should be celebrated with "a banquet," and he had sent down the things, — oysters and birds, a turkey, ices, a bottle or two of the old Indiana German's wine, — and when the family and the three friends gathered around the table it was under a tension of excitement that made it impossible for the little girl to sit still half a minute, and that even threatened the equipoise of Drewdie Poteet. Paul Rodman and Barney Carruthers abandoned themselves to unrestrained jollity, and the husband and wife, though always a little subdued, as if not yet accustomed to their changed circumstances, seemed as happy in the good spirits of the rollicking boys as in their own good fortune.

After a while Paul Rodman stood up and drank a toast in the old German's wine. "To the foundation of our civilization," he said in his solemnest manner, "the inspiration of all

our efforts, the haven of all our achievements, The Home."

Then, in response to the clamorous demands of Barney Carruthers and Drewdie Poteet, he went on and made a speech, all about The Home. And a beautiful speech it was, so everybody thought. Near the end of it Barney and Drewdie became very still and grave, while Slade scraped his foot raspingly on the floor and gulped down a great deal of water. A strangely wistful look was on Mrs. Slade as she watched the speaker, and finally, as he tried to turn his head to hide from them a tear that suddenly started down his cheek, she covered her face with her hands; seeing which, the little girl, whose eyes had been growing bigger and bigger, broke into a heart-rending wail, and running around the table buried her sobs in her mother's lap.

Which ended Paul's speech and brought back the laughter to the banqueters.

A week later Paul had sold his Third Street lot for a hundred dollars less than he had paid for it, and had bought several lots in the West End, near the scene of his eloquent speech.

"I'm going to have cottages built on them," he explained to Barney Carruthers and Drew-

die Poteet. "Then I'm going to sell them on easy terms to people who would probably never own homes of their own on any other plan. I think it can be made a paying business; anyway, it's a good business."

IV

THE BLOOM FROM THE BLUR

THE year that followed saw some changes in the affairs of the three friends. It brought Barney Carruthers' books a few small fees, some of which he collected. It satisfied Drewdie Poteet that his Vocation in Life was not to paint, but to write, and he was already devoting half an hour or so a day to the production of a story which should prove this to the world. It confirmed Paul Rodman's confidence in his plan of buying cheap lots and building on them; for he had made a fair start during these first twelve months, considering his limited capital, which he succeeded in increasing a little by long-time notes and liens.

He had gone into a bank one day to borrow a small sum, before in his inexperience he knew that banks were not the places to negotiate loans on such security as he had to offer.

He was referred to Mr. Oxnard, and on confronting that official was unprepared to find in him the man of the dyed mustache and the crushed peaches who had figured so prominently in Paul's first journey to Louisville.

Oxnard looked up and evidently recognized Paul instantly. His face mottled and his eyes shone, but he did not speak.

Paul for a moment was clearly at a loss for his cue. He took a step backward, as if to beat an unexplained retreat, but he recovered himself and summoned a smile to his aid.

"I — beg your pardon," he said. "I came on a little matter of business, but I see that I came to the wrong place."

Oxnard stood like stone, his eyes transfixing Paul and the perspiration slowly dampening his seaming forehead.

"Quite evident," he replied through his closed teeth.

Paul did not linger.

"Who is this man Oxnard, in the Beargrass Bank?" he asked Drewdie Poteet that night.

"Judd Oxnard? Why, he *is* the Beargrass Bank. One of the self-made men of the town. Started as elevator boy down on Main Street

somewhere, and is now worth a quarter of a million."

"But has never found time to marry yet?" Paul asked. "Or is he a widower?"

"There's been a Mrs. Oxnard for about twenty years, I believe."

"The scoundrel!"

"Been in business long enough to find that out?"

"He's the fellow I had to put off the train that day."

"Oh!" said Drewdie Poteet, in a tone that indicated he had hoped for a more sensational disclosure. "Oxnard has the reputation of being quite a ladies' man, you know."

Paul had never again seen the girl who had been, without her knowledge, the heroine of his first adventure with Oxnard. He had seen her leave the train at Louisville, and afterwards he had looked for her face in the throngs on the streets and at the theatres. Later as, under the wing of Drewdie Poteet, he began going into society, he half expected to meet her at some of the balls and receptions. It was not until nearly two years after that day on the train that he found her again.

It was at a "dinner-dance." Glancing across

the two stretches of banked flowers and the two rows of guests seated at the great horse-shoe table, he saw her, facing him, on the other side of the room. He suspended a sentence which he had begun, and the girl he was talking to tentatively suggested a word which deflected his sentence to a very different idea from that toward which he had started it.

"Yes, that is it exactly," he stupidly responded. "Don't you agree with me?"

"Thoroughly. But you are the first person I have yet found that I could agree with on that point."

And she ever afterwards insisted that Paul Rodman was one of the few really clever men in town.

A little later he said, —

"I thought I knew every one here; who is the girl opposite, between Fletcher Keith and Tom Lusk?"

"Haven't you met her? It's Lucy Arnan. Been abroad for a year or two, and is just home."

When the dinner was over and the dancing began, he made his way toward Lucy Arnan at his first opportunity. But that was not

before he had seen Fletcher Keith dance with her, surrender her to another partner, and almost immediately return to claim her again. Already, in his apprehension of the rare grace of her dancing — which seemed as much a part of his pulses as was the music itself — and of the elusive beauty of her face, blooming out from the blur of the ballroom like a lily in the dusk, was the pricking resentment against the presumption of Keith.

The music had now ceased, and Keith was taking her into the hall and toward the stairway. Looking around for some one to serve his purpose, Paul ran into Drewdie Poteet.

"Present me to the girl with Fletcher Keith," he said. "What is her name?"

He had heard it half an hour before, but in the commotion which the sight of her had stirred within him he had forgotten it half a minute later.

"Who? That? Oh," Drewdie answered, with a mild smile, "that is Luce Arnan."

"*Who?*"

There was an emphasis in the word, which plainly implied surprise and protest, and which, could Drewdie have failed to note it, was

doubly enforced by the almost fierce fixity of the eyes which Paul fastened on him.

"Luce — Miss Lucy Arnan," Drewdie qualified, with a twitch at the corners of his mouth. "Come along, then, old man, if you wish to meet her. But I don't think she 's the kind of girl you like."

"I do wish to meet Miss Arnan," Paul responded a little stiffly.

They started to the stairway, where Miss Arnan and Keith had found seats, Paul still smarting at the manner in which Drewdie Poteet had referred to the girl.

As they stopped before Miss Arnan, Paul, for an acute moment, felt the qualm of a doubt as to his reception. Would she remember him? Would she recall against him the rudeness and persistence of his staring at her on the train?

His suspense was quickly ended. As Drewdie spoke Paul's name she looked up at him out of those blue, blue eyes with only a sweet graciousness, and she gave him her gloved hand with a winning cordiality in its gentle pressure that thrilled his memory and his dreams for weeks. That high-bred, sensitive face, almost spiritually beautiful in the delicate play of

expression and the exquisite fairness of the skin against the blue-blackness of her soft hair, surely bore no shadow of so vulgar a reminiscence. Paul Rodman was profoundly thankful and profoundly happy.

He was happy for months afterwards, in the presence or the thought of Lucy Arnan.

It is not intended to say that before he met Lucy Arnan he had never been strongly attracted by other women. He was young, ardent, imaginative, and with his idealization of the sex had been more than once on the verge of "falling in love." The fact that, until he loved Lucy Arnan, he had never got beyond the verge, was perhaps due to that very idealization. As richly dowered mentally and physically as other girls were, none had ever fulfilled his requirements until Lucy Arnan came. And when she came he knew at once, in the blindness of his exaltation, that all his dreams and hopes of Woman were true!

He surrendered without reserve to the ecstasy of his passion. He could not have resisted it if he would. But he had no wish to resist it. It was the one supreme blessing which fate could bestow upon him; now only

had life really begun and was he worthy to live.

When a young man with such notions as these concentrates them on something tangible like Lucy Arnan he does not dally in his wooing. Paul lost no time in laying his siege. His attentions were assiduous, and, while marked by the deference of a courtier, were thoroughly unaffected and fervidly direct. No woman would have misunderstood them, and none would have been wholly indifferent to them.

He did not seriously doubt the result. His love had been intensified by the conviction that she had been attracted to him, as he had been to her, from the first. While Lucy Arnan never forgot that modest reserve which was so charming to Paul, there were certain delicate indications in her manner toward him, which only he could have detected, showing him plainly that he was not as other men to her. He chafed against the conventionality which forbade an immediate avowal, but he restrained himself resolutely, shrinking from any appearance of inconsideration or rashness which could have wounded in the least the most sensitive self-respect of a refined woman, or could have

warranted the slightest suspicion of the sincerity and depth of his devotion.

Meanwhile, it was an additional spur to him in his work to know that Lucy Arnan would bring him nothing but herself; that it was to be his part to provide for her comfort, as well as to enfold her with his love. And he would have thought he had been denied one happiness of a perfect marriage if it had been otherwise.

V

A SPOILED PEN INSTEAD OF A BROKEN NECK

FROM the first Paul's choice had lacked the approval of Barney Carruthers and Drewdie Poteet, though neither had made any outspoken demurrer in Paul's presence. Barney, indeed, had no reason to demur, except that which he found in Drewdie's objection; but that was sufficient for Barney. He was not acquainted with Miss Arnan, but Drewdie Poteet was; and as between Paul Rodman, who knew all about women theoretically, and Drewdie Poteet, who knew them only practically, he deferred, on this subject, entirely to Drewdie. Barney was not a "ladies' man" himself: he was awkward and ill at ease in their company; he honestly averred that he would rather do a day's ploughing than "dyke" himself up for an evening call; and Paul and Drewdie could never induce him to accompany them in their social diversions. He was

ever ready, however, to encourage Paul to go out and "cut a dash," and found an untiring pleasure in listening to reports of the experiences of both Paul and Drewdie "in society," while his fund of amused, semi-cynical comment and counsel was exhaustless. But beneath all his good-natured raillery he was as keenly interested in the doings of his two chums in the gay world as if they were a pair of débutantes and he their mother.

The one subject, however, on which Paul had nothing to say to either Barney or Drewdie was Lucy Arnan. Barney understood Paul well enough to realize that this was the most ominous indication of the true state of affairs. He knew that Paul held the object of his love too sacred for discussion even with his most intimate friend. Beyond this silence and the ever obvious evidence that Paul was living in the skies, Barney's knowledge of the situation and his attitude to it were traceable wholly to Drewdie Poteet. Drewdie, while he had never dared in Paul's presence to discourage his partiality for Lucy Arnan, was all the freer in expressing his disapproval to Barney Carruthers.

"Oh! I can't say that there's anything

particular against her," he would reply to Barney's catechising, "but she's certainly not one of those way-up girls that Rod thinks her — and does n't come as near it, by a long sight, as lots of other girls he knows."

"She has a pretty face, has n't she?"

"Yes. Everybody admits that."

"With sort of a quiet, er — superfine look?"

"Well, I suppose you might call it that."

"With eyes that are a little extra size, and soft, and what you might catalogue as the bottomless kind?"

"That seems to hit them off pretty well," Drewdie laughed.

"She's slenderish and tallish, I reckon," Barney went on; "rather slow-gaited and graceful; dresses plainly, and always knows what to wear with her eyes and her hair."

"You must have seen her. They say she won't go to a dinner unless the 'color scheme' suits her style of beauty."

"I've never seen her; but I have a pretty clear notion what sort of a girl would set Polly's ideal works going."

"What's to be done about it?"

"Nothing."

"Could n't I — could n't we tell him that

they say she was sent off to boarding-school to keep her out of the way of the celebrated Fletcher Keith?"

"It would n't do a bit of good. And, besides, Polly would be apt to get smiling-mad and break your neck for your trouble."

Barney Carruthers was too wise to believe that anything could be done to bring the lover to his senses except to trust to time. He enjoined upon Drewdie Poteet the virtue of ignoring Paul's infatuation in Paul's presence, and himself scrupulously refrained from making any reference to it, unless in an indirect manner.

"How 's business?" he might ask.

"Coming on pretty well," Paul would answer.

"So is Polly, ain't he, Drewdie Poteet? You would n't think that Polly was raised down in the country to be an old-fashioned Southern gentleman, suh? Here he is holding his own with the professional hustlers, making the commons to blossom like a green bay-window and causing two houses to grow where but one blade of grass grew before. And the time will yet come — then you 'll remember me for a prophet, Drewdie Poteet — when Polly Rodman will also outgrow as

completely his old-fashioned Southern ideas about 'the ladies, God bless 'em.'"

Or Barney would close a novel and throw it away. "Another escaped angel for a heroine," he would scoff. "I reckon you'd like that book, Polly. Drewdie Poteet, don't you go on making Polly Rodman the hero of that story you are writing. You wait till Polly has had a chance to finish his education by looking into a clothes-closet. No high-souled youth who has beautiful ideals about a girl angel is fully educated until he sees inside her clothes-closet."

On which occasions Paul would laugh much more heartily than Drewdie Poteet would, and with the generous complacence of one who alone understood what he laughed at, and how little, how less than little, Barney Carruthers knew about women.

It was Drewdie Poteet's failure to heed Barney's injunction of silence on the subject of Lucy Arnan that precipitated the climax of Paul's wooing.

Paul entered Barney's room one warm evening in early summer.

"Where's Barney?" he asked Drewdie Poteet, who was lolling in the window.

"Does n't seem to have come in yet. Anything on hand?"

"No, only I thought it would be a good night to row up the river for a swim," Paul suggested, seating himself on the edge of a table.

"Not going out among the girls to-night, then?"

"No."

There was an interlude of silence during which Drewdie idly thumped his heel against the wall, and looked meditatively down on the street, while Paul slowly beat a tattoo on the table with a pen.

When Drewdie again spoke, it was with his eyes still fixed on the street and with an occasional halt between his words, —

"Having a — good time out on Gray Street, Rod?"

"The best in the world," Paul replied, without looking up.

Drewdie waited, while he leaned out and intently inspected a mail-collector who drove up to the letter-box on the corner, took out its contents, and moved on in his cart again.

"Ever notice how much sense these mail-

cart horses have? I — thought you'd catch on there. She's — she's just the girl to have a good time with."

Paul looked up suddenly, and spoke a little more rapidly than was his custom.

"Here, Drewdie, what are you driving at?" he asked.

Drewdie gave one final kick upon the wall before he answered, —

"Oh, nothing — in particular. Only, you know, if — well, I've been in Louisville lots longer than you, Rod, and if — if I were going to tie on to a girl for good, Luce Arnan would hardly be just the kind of a — "

"Never mind, Drewdie." Paul's tattoo abruptly ceased; he was sitting erect, and he was speaking in a voice which, though no higher than usual, was new to Drewdie, who felt that it was to be heeded. "As you are *not* going to tie on to a girl for good, we won't discuss the subject further."

He went to another window and looked up and down the street.

"Barney is late," he said. "Well," turning to leave, "if you and he have any plan for to-night, better not wait for me. I may not be back for some time."

He walked away, and Drewdie called after him uncertainly, —

"It *would* be a good night for a swim, Rod."

"Yes; but we ought to have made an earlier start."

Paul was gone; and Drewdie sat motionless in the window until Barney Carruthers returned and discovered a pen standing on end, stuck deep into the wood of the table.

"How'd you do this, Drewdie Poteet? Must have driven it in with a sledge-hammer."

"Rod did it," Drewdie replied lugubriously.

"Rod?"

"He got what you call smiling-mad, and he shoved that pen into the table, I suppose instead of breaking my neck."

VI

A RAPID WALK AND A CLOSED GATE

PAUL went down the stairs to the street with swift, vigorous steps. As he turned into Fourth Street and up Market a casual observer, whom Paul would not have seen three feet away, would have said that here was a young man hurrying on some mission which engrossed his mind to the exclusion of all else. But Paul was going nowhere, for no purpose, except to get away from Drewdie Poteet and all other human companionship. He wanted to be in the open air, where he could move and breathe and be alone, and he attained those objects none the less because he was walking through one of the most populous quarters of the city. His first sensation following Drewdie's flippant words had been one of shocked amazement, instantly merging into the resentment of a fierce wrath. It is doubtful if he would have been so profoundly stirred if some leering tongue had flouted the name of

his mother, for his mother was an abstraction, not even a memory, while Lucy Arnan, in addition to representing the sex which he revered as an abstraction, was an individuality vital with the charms that were strongest to appeal to his masculine sense of chivalric fealty and personal appropriation. As Drewdie spoke, Paul's impulse had been to spring forward and kill — not Drewdie himself, for Drewdie Poteet was only Drewdie Poteet, and merely voiced the sacrilege of a sacrilegious age without himself really comprehending it — but kill because the first and last recourse of the primal man wronged beyond endurance is to kill, and because for the moment all else had been struck aside and Paul was the primal man.

But he had been prompt to put the grip of control on his passion, and he had left Drewdie in order to seek in the peopled streets other vent for the stress of his emotion.

He walked on for nearly a mile up the broad thoroughfare, lined on either side by retail shops which grew smaller the further east he went. The street was alive with the mild animation of a summer evening. The shopkeepers and their families were all out of

doors, grouped in chairs on the sidewalks; the men in shirt sleeves; many of the women nursing babies; children romping everywhere under the passer's feet; the loungers, when they were not dully silent, chattering in broken English and nondescript foreign tongues.

Paul steered his course along the sidewalk automatically, veering around the knots of idlers, avoiding the orbits of juvenile comets, stepping over a crawling infant, with a mechanical instinct that made no demands upon his mental powers.

It was not until the buildings began to straggle and the lights to grow irregular that his turbulence of resentment and rebellion against the shallow materialism for which Drewdie Poteet had spoken subsided, before a new purpose that confronted him with a finality as becalmingly real as the solid wall of the church suddenly looming before him in the shadow. He stopped as abruptly as if the wall were an impassable barrier; his eyes held it as though it were a new and strange discovery; he stood in front of it, his face lifted to its dark mass, a long breath, like the first that one inhales when coming out of a close air, distending his nostrils.

A clock struck the half-hour through the deserted silence, and he turned and with the impulse of a new determination began rapidly retracing his steps. When he reached First Street again, he plunged south into that. He had a sensation as if he were walking on a treadwheel. There was motion, but he did not seem to advance. A negro trotted a horse up and down the street for exercise, and the clatter appeared incessant and aimless. On the asphalt before him a youth was holding a girl on a bicycle as she pedalled with the uncertainty of a beginner, and to Paul it was as if he had followed the pair leagues. Away out at Broadway a fire engine dashed across the street, then a second, and a third; and it seemed the same engine that comes and goes silently and forever among the views of a kinetoscope.

At last he reached Gray Street and turned into it with a slight slackening of his steps, as if the tension of his race were suddenly relaxed, or over.

Gray is a short street in the old residence quarter of Louisville, from which the tide of fashion has set further outward, leaving it a shady slit of serenity and antiquity in the

heart of the city. With only a few exceptions, its houses are old, ranging from several plain and spacious mansions of the conservative well-to-do, through the two-story brick houses of the less pretentious, to the cottages of the wholly unpretentious. They stand under forest trees in grassy yards, and the old-time brick sidewalks are laid around the boles of two rows of great sycamores and maples, sentinelling a quietude that is rarely broken by any commotion more strenuous than the laughter of children at play.

As Paul Rodman entered the sylvan gloom of this street to-night, the stillness was only intensified, not disturbed, by a murmur of fitful talk that drifted to him from a vine-hid veranda, and by the croon, somewhere, of a woman's lullaby. In one darkened doorway were light draperies and the lazy flutter of a fan. Through a window a yellow-shaded lamp shone, and in its mellow glow he saw the lace curtains stirred faintly by a breeze that was too languorous to ripple a leaf nearer him, though it seemed to bring to him the insidious odors that the balm and the dew distilled from the summer night. A square ahead an electric globe suffused the overhanging foliage of June

with the tenderest tints of April. Not far beyond this Paul opened a little iron gate and stepped into the inclosure in which, under the trees, the modest home of Lucy Arnan nestled.

As the gate clicked behind him, it closed upon all his past, — his indefinite longings, his tentative stirrings, his self-imposed restraint, all his immature youth; and he went toward the house with the sure stride of a man in his manhood, who knew his own, and his way to it, steadied by this great new knowledge, quickened by the new call that had come to him, all-submerging in its sweetness, all impelling in its might, to stand henceforth by the side of the girl he loved, to encompass her with the protection of his strength and the reverence of his devotion.

Ten minutes after she came down to him in her little parlor that night, he had impetuously swept aside every hesitating quibble which she had opposed to his sudden avowal, had won her promise to be his wife, and before he left, with transfigured countenance, hours later, had forced her consent that the engagement should be announced at once.

VII

THE HOUSE IN THE HIGHLANDS

THEY were to be married at the end of a year. Lucy Arnan would not consent to an earlier wedding. She was pleased to convince Paul that she was not a mere "society girl," with no conception of the practical side of life. The two put their heads together, and discussed the practical side of life with unreserved confidences, and in all the tender romance and sweet witchery in which the practical side of life can be discussed by two young lovers shut off from it in some cosy corner of their own little world, and shut in with nothing more practical than murmured hopes, meeting glances, and touching hands. These delightful confidences disclosed that Lucy had nothing, and that Paul had little, — very little, indeed, for two. Lucy was glad to begin with Paul at the bottom, and Paul knew that with her by his side he could make his way upward all the surer and faster. They agreed

that they would not have had it otherwise, for those who did not begin their married lives at the bottom missed that perfection of a true marriage known only to those who work and win with each other, for each other. Nevertheless, Lucy was positive that a year, at least — she at first held out for two years — was as soon as she could go to Paul without being such a burden upon him as to handicap rather than help him, and Paul had to content himself with his victory when he made her cut the two years' waiting to one.

It was truly a wonderful year for Paul, — a year in which he realized instead of hoped that the highest estate of man was to be his; in which his buoyant energy was employed in tangible preparations for his entrance upon that estate, while his beatified leisure was spent in the company of the girl to whom he owed the certainty and the completeness of it all. He pushed his business with ardor. Before, he had found a zest in his work because he liked it, and because it was to enable him to take the place which he meant to take in the world; now, he felt the elixir of work which was for her who was to share that place with him, and which was to make it worthy of her.

But it was not until he bought a lot upon which to build their own home, that he proved how much work a man could do in twenty-four hours, and how many hours of the twenty-four he could still spend with Lucy Arnan. He described the lot to Barney Carruthers and Drewdie Poteet as "a bargain in the Highlands, with an acre of real trees on it, a million acres of real sky above it, and all of Cherokee Park for a back yard." It was to be a little house, — at first just big enough for two, with a spare room for a friend now and then, — but it took weeks to decide on the plans; weeks which were all too short, as they necessitated many extra visits to Gray Street, and many extra hours of consultation with Lucy Arnan. When the house actually began to go up, every detail of it was personally supervised by Paul with a concern that prompted many alterations in the original plans and many further conferences with Lucy. Occasionally, when Lucy and he were hopelessly dubious on some point, Barney Carruthers and Drewdie Poteet were called into consultation; and Drewdie, who, since the night when he had tried to discourage Paul's preference for Lucy, had sought to assist Paul

in forgetting that mishap by a greater show of friendliness to both him and Lucy Arnan, usually managed to solve the difficulties by suggestions so happy that he surprised himself and began to ponder whether he had not been intended for an architect instead of an author.

Barney Carruthers at first had been somewhat shy and constrained in the presence of Lucy Arnan, but after he had once allowed himself to tell her a joke at Paul's expense and found that she relished it as heartily as Paul himself did, he not only began to feel at his ease with her, but he admitted to Drewdie that he had liked her "from the jump."

"I tell you, Drewdie Poteet," he said, as soon as the two were out of Paul's hearing, "that girl 's a brick, or I don't know a tenth as much about women as even Polly Rodman knows."

"Well, maybe she is," Drewdie conceded. "Let 's hope for the best. I only meant that I did n't think her one of those way-up girls that would suit a way-up fellow like Rod."

"Let me tell you a little secret, Drewdie. A way-up fellow, like Polly, usually pulls up the girl he is in love with, if she 's in love with him. If she finds out that he 's as ignorant

about women as Polly is, and that he believes her to be a way-up girl, she 's going to do her best to get up just as near the notch he thinks her in as she can. And as long as they are in love with each other, and she tries to live up to his ignorance, a man like Polly will never discover the difference; and, anyway, what *is* the difference?"

"Maybe it will come out all right, after all. Girls and men that don't seem like the right thing for happy marriages often turn out the very thing, you know."

"Which is lucky enough, as they are the sort that usually marry each other."

As the house neared completion the interest which Barney Carruthers and Drewdie Poteet took in it seemed to be less only than that of Paul himself. There were few walks of the three now which did not end with the Highlands, a seat on some part of the unfinished building, and a conference as to progress, with a detailed exhibition by Paul of what had been done and an explanation of what was proposed. Nor was it often necessary for Paul to lead the walks in that direction. Drewdie was usually ready to express a desire to see how his own architectural suggestions were being carried

out, and Barney as frequently, when the trio set forth, would relieve Drewdie of the initiative.

"I move that for a change we stroll to the Highlands this time," he would say. "I want to see if that house is still there. Course, I remember that Polly got out of bed last night and went up to see if it was still safe, but that was hours and hours ago." Or: "Gentlemen, I will now take you to see the sights of the city. First and foremost, I will show you, what you may possibly have heard of, but can never have seen, a house, — to be specific, a dwelling-house, when constructed. The city of Louisville may not be able to prove that this is the only house in the world, gentlemen, but there is no doubt that it is the only one of its kind known to be in existence."

At last it was finished; and then was the even more interesting work of furnishing it, — more interesting to Paul because this required the personal co-operation of Lucy Arnan. She hesitated a little when he first proposed it. People would talk so, she objected, blushing. But he had his way. People be hanged! Besides, everybody knew of the coming wedding. So it was that Lucy and he went to

the shops together, and spent days inspecting, consulting, deciding, and undeciding, — the most wonderfully happy days that Paul even yet had known; for in this common and open preparation of the home they were to share, the last barrier between them seemed to have vanished and the marriage vows remained as only a formality; while, unconcealed and practical as it all was, the sweetness and sacredness of its meaning, for them alone, were such as to exclude all outward intrusion. Not even Barney Carruthers and Drewdie Poteet had any part in the work of these last days.

Then came a time when everything had been done, and the little house stood ready, with the keys in Paul's pocket. The wedding was only four days away now, — a church wedding, which Lucy had determined on because there were so many people she ought to invite; and Barney Carruthers was in a pitiful stew with the tailors and his responsibilities as best man, though Drewdie Poteet, who was to be a groomsman, had come to the rescue and had taken all the responsibilities on his own adequate shoulders.

Paul conducted his two cronies to the Highlands the first night after the house was fur-

nished, and threw it open for their admiration. Not a cranny of it was unexposed, not an electric button unpressed, not an ingenious contrivance for Lucy's comfort in closet or dining-room was left unexploited. Drewdie was critically explicit in his approval, and Barney walked from point to point almost on tiptoe.

Upstairs Paul turned on the light in what might have been taken for a smoking-room if it had not also been fitted up as a bedroom.

"We started out to have one spare room," Paul explained, "but we ended with two, — this and the one adjoining. That one we call Drewdie Poteet's room; this one, Barney Carruthers'. Whenever you old chaps feel like taking a walk to the Highlands, you will always find your rooms ready for you. It — it," Paul's voice was becoming a little unsteady, "was as much Lucy's idea as mine. We've had a good time together, podners, and — and — well, I swear it sha'n't end now!"

Paul turned his back on the other two, to raise a window and look hard at his coal-house; Drewdie took a quick step toward Paul and then turned his back, to examine the pipes on the mantel; while Barney sat down

on the nearest chair, with an expression as if he had summoned a laugh that would not come, and seeing two backs, dashed his knuckles across his eyes and roared, —

"You infernal lunkhead, Polly Rodman! Who the tarnation ever said it would end?"

Later, as Paul was making sure of the locks on the outer doors, Barney and Drewdie walked down to the gate.

"Do you reckon," asked Drewdie, a little dolefully, "there was ever anybody any happier than old Rod is, and has been for a year?"

"Never was," Barney replied, "and never will be — except Rod himself, to-morrow. Rod is in a higher heaven every day now than he was the day before. That's the way he was built."

"And it is all through Lucy Arnan. I'd give a million if I had n't spoken to him about her in that shabby way, that time."

"Don't you worry. He has n't ever shown you he remembers it, has he?"

"Not once."

"Then you may go broke that if he remembers it he only pities you for your ignorance, or your inability to appreciate such a fine girl."

Barney's tone might have indicated that he himself had come to pity Drewdie for the same reason.

As the three tramped back that night, they were almost as quiet as the sleeping streets through which they passed. Usually their walks were filled with chat and snatches of song, but to-night they stalked solemnly arm in arm, the spell of the little house in the Highlands upon them, and in some sense the realization that this would probably be their last walk together before Paul's marriage, after which, be their friendship what it might, it could never be just the same.

VIII

THE HOUSE ON GRAY STREET

THAT was Saturday night. The wedding was to be Tuesday. Sunday night found Paul Rodman at the door of the house on Gray Street unusually early. He had not seen Lucy Arnan since Saturday afternoon, and he was impatient to end the long separation.

The door opening to his ring, he was about to step in, as had come to be his custom, without asking for Lucy, assuming, of course, that he was expected; his glow of happiness further fed by the belief that she awaited him with something of his own eagerness. But for the first time since he had known Lucy he was intercepted by the servant.

"Miss Lucy wishes to be excused to-night, Mr. Rodman," the girl said, with parrot-like precision. "She is not feeling very well and has retired."

"Oh!" he replied a little blankly. "Tell her I'm very, very sorry, and that I will call again to-morrow morning."

He turned away and walked slowly along the street. His disappointment was so sudden and so great that its effect, at first, was one of dull bewilderment. His mind was an indefinite and depressed jumble. It was like a gong which vibrates, not with any force of its own, but from that of an exterior blow. Thus he strolled on for a square, under the dense shadows of the trees, when he was recalled to consciousness that he was on a public street by a "Beg your pardon" from a man against whom he had brushed. Almost instantly, as he reviewed more sanely the incident of his call two minutes before, he was deluged by a tide of self-condemnation and solicitude for Lucy. He realized now that in the shock to his selfishness caused by the collapse of his expectation to spend the evening with her, he had lost sight of the possible seriousness of her illness. Self-wrapt brute that he was, he had not even thought to seek Mrs. Arnan and learn from her whether there was any cause for fear that Lucy's indisposition was more than trivial and temporary. He

turned and swiftly retraced his steps to the house.

When the servant opened the door to him again, he entered, hardly pausing as he passed her.

"Tell Mrs. Arnan I wish to see her a moment," he directed.

He walked on toward the little library at the end of the hall, where he knew that Mrs. Arnan was often to be found.

"Yes, sir. She ain't in there, Mr. Rodman," the servant answered quickly. "Have a seat in the parlor."

But Paul was near enough to see a section of a skirt through the library door.

"You need n't mind, Betty," he said to the girl; "I 'll find Mrs. Arnan."

Long afterwards Paul recalled that as Betty disappeared she seemed to be suppressing a titter.

He went on into the library. Some one was seated at a table, writing. But it was Lucy, instead of Mrs. Arnan.

She looked up at him as he entered, and the light fell on her face with a strange, opaque effect.

If when, a few minutes before, he had been

denied admission Paul's first thought was of himself, his first thought now was of Lucy. He hurried to her, both hands extended.

"Oh, it is you!" he cried, in a voice of profound thankfulness and joy. "I was afraid you might be really ill."

She rose and let him take her limp hand. Her face was relaxed, almost bloodless, as from weariness, but her eyes deepened and softened as she looked intently at Paul.

"What did Betty tell you?" she asked finally, in a tone more in keeping with the face than the eyes.

"That you were not feeling well and had retired," he answered gently.

"Yes, I ordered her to say that," with a faint, fleeting smile. "I wished to go up early to-night; but I had a letter to write first."

Paul drew her to him tenderly and held her, with his arm about her.

"You do look tired," he said anxiously; "and you are not yourself this evening. You must put off the letter-writing and get a long night's rest. Come, let me see you start now. It will give me an opportunity to accompany you as far as the stairs."

His last sentence was spoken with an affec-

tation of cheerful lightness to which she did not respond. He felt her form straighten by his side, and for the first time since his coming she returned the clasp of his hand.

"No! no!" she exclaimed, with a vehemence in marked contrast with her previous manner. "I do not wish you to go yet. I am not ill. Indeed, it is not that. You must stay with me a little while now."

"But do you think you ought to let me?" doubtfully.

"Yes, yes! I sha'n't let you go for ten—no, fifteen minutes. You *must* stay for fifteen minutes; then you *must* go."

She was trying to laugh, but it was plain that she was tremendously in earnest.

She led him to the sofa, and, her hand still in his, drew him to a seat on it close by her side.

"Now talk to me! talk to me!" she said, her head resting against the wall, her eyes closed. "Tell me the beautiful things you think of me! Tell them again! Tell them all!"

Paul answered with a short laugh of delight. He had told her those things before, but she had never before invited, ordered him to tell them.

He began as if to humor her, half playfully at first, but soon continued with a fervor that caused now his low voice to falter and again his hastening words to overleap each other impetuously. And they were, indeed, beautiful things he told her, — idyllic, divine, — for he spoke to her out of the fulness of the dreams of his secluded, poetic boyhood, and in her he saw their perfect incarnation. She listened to him silently, only an occasional pressure of her hand, the dawning glow in her pale cheeks, the irregular commotion of the violets on her bosom, attesting that she heard.

"And now," he concluded, "my fifteen minutes are up," leaning over and lightly touching with his lips her closed lids. "That is for a sweet sleep. Good-night."

He rose to go, but she sprang up at the same time, and catching his arm, cried quickly, as if suddenly wakened in alarm from a shallow sleep, —

"No! no! Not yet! Just a little longer! Just five minutes more!"

If every hour of Paul's life before that had been torture, it would have been worth it all to live for that moment.

"Surely," he beamed, "we may allow our-

selves five minutes more. Really," bending to her as if to whisper a secret, "you are looking quite yourself again: indeed, you are looking more beautiful than I ever saw you."

She did not seem to heed, but said rapidly, brokenly, —

"There are some things yet — some things that I want to hear you say — that I want to say — that — oh, Paul, look at me!"

She lifted her face, her eyes wide, rapt, searching his.

"Tell me again that you love me."

He smiled at her mood, at the superfluousness of such an assurance. But he answered with vibrant gravity, —

"I love you, Lucy, — more than you will ever know, more than I can ever make you understand."

"And you will love me always?"

"Always."

"Not less, whatever happens?"

"Nothing could happen to make me love you less."

She bowed her head against his arm, which she still held. For several seconds she was silent and motionless, except for one quivering sigh. Then she looked up at him again.

"And I love you, Paul, — you always, you alone, whatever happens. Never forget that, Paul."

"I know that, dear. I am as sure of your love for me as I am of mine for you. That is the glorious perfection of it." He took her hands, and holding them together, lifted them to his lips.

"And now, Paul, kiss me!"

As he kissed her mouth once, twice, with reverent passion, her arms pressed him convulsively.

"Good-night, Paul," she almost sobbed. "Good-bye. Now you must go. Go! go!"

She pushed him toward the door, but when he reached it she flung herself suddenly between it and him.

"Wait!" There was an electric change in tone and manner. "You shall not go yet. I have something to tell you."

"Why, Lucy," all his solicitude for her returning, "how excited you are! I should not have remained at all. Come," soothingly, "you must put me out, and get to sleep at once."

"If I am excited, it is because of what I have to tell you. I did not expect to tell you face

to face. I intended to write it to you. I had begun the letter when you came. But I am not going to be such a coward now. I will tell you with my own lips. Please light another jet of the chandelier. I am not afraid of the light now."

Paul, surprised and puzzled, did as he was requested, utterly unable to account for this singular conduct of Lucy's. Outwardly now she was composed. Her face was pale and resolute, and if her voice, which had hardened, betrayed any unsteadiness, it was the tremor of a steel rapier.

As Paul, after lighting the jet, turned to her again, she had thrown herself on the sofa, where she sat, her burning eyes fixed on him. He went toward her, but stopped before her, studying her in open perplexity.

"I should ask you to sit down again," she said in almost even, tense tones; "but you would refuse, when you know. You will never sit down in — this house again."

"Lucy!" his low exclamation, as he took a quick step forward, was a cry of mingled protest and apprehension for her. "What is it that is troubling you, dear? Why are you talking so strangely?"

She warded him off with her hand. "Don't come nearer! Don't touch me! You will understand in a — in a moment. Only give me a little time."

He waited, speechless, not knowing what further to say, never taking his eyes from the rigid figure, the head now turned half aside, the hands clutching each other in her lap.

Suddenly she began speaking, without changing her posture, without looking at him, a spasmodic twitch of the hands being the only physical reflex of her words.

"When I instructed Betty not to admit you to-night, it was not because I was not feeling well, but because I did not intend to see you. I — there was something you had to know, which I did not think I had the courage to tell you, except by letter. But now, well, you shall not accuse me of that contemptibleness."

"Surely, Lucy, there can be nothing that should disturb you — that should — "

She whirled upon him, and thrusting her hand in her bosom, drew out a letter and extended it to him.

"Read it!" she ordered. "That will explain."

He took it, his eyes on her rather than on

the letter. He unfolded the sheet, still studying her inscrutable face; then, glancing at the letter, he again looked over it to her.

"Why," he said, "this is to you."

"Read it. He would not mind."

It was written on the ruled paper of a New York hotel, in a florid hand that might have been acquired in a "business college." It ran: —

THE ELLSMORE, NEW YORK, June 7.

MISS LUCY ARNAN LOUISVILLE KY

DEAR MISS LUCY I am sorry I cannot see you in person to talk over this matter but I am booked to sail for London Monday and it is most important that I don't Fail to make connection — To come to the point perhaps you have seen that I am now a Free man — The decree was handed down this morning so my lawyers wire me — I am the happiest of men for it gives me liberty to follow my heart — My love my darling you must have known that I have long worshipt the very ground you tred on and that nothing but circumstances kept me from throwing myself and mine at your Feet. Say you will marry me little sweetheart and reward my long waiting — This should reach you by Saturday please wire your answer by Sunday night at latest — I will return from Europe in 3 weeks when all the arrangements can be Fixed up — The late Mrs. O was allowed a pretty

stiff Alimony also the children but there is enough left for Two and love in a cottige — I will settle $100,000 on you before the not is tied — Wire me yes at once little woman

Yours with 1000 K–sses

JUDD F OXNARD

As Paul read this the veins on his temples began to swell and the muscles of his jaws tautened visibly. By the time he had finished it the nails of his clenched fist were driven into his palm with the force with which at the moment he longed to tear the throat of the writer. Murder was in his plunging heart, in his contracted sinews. For the instant it was almost as if Oxnard himself were in the room, and Paul, on account of Lucy's presence, felt the necessity of temporary self-restraint. Mainly for the purpose of gaining time for that restraint, he re-read the letter slowly, from beginning to end.

Then crumpling the sheet in his hand, he threw it to the floor, and turning again to Lucy Arnan, he stepped to her side, his whole countenance suffused with the light of love and compassion that welled from his eyes.

"Lucy!" his voice at once a throbbing

caress and proud reassurance, "why should you have feared to show me that letter, dear? Did you think it possible for me to misjudge you? Did you doubt that I should *know* you were not in the least responsible for his presumption, — that you had given him no more cause for his insolence than an angel in heaven? Why, there is no angel in heaven that scoundrel would not insult."

He had stooped, one knee on the sofa beside her, and reached to take her hand; but she stood up at once, straight and aloof.

There was a brief silence between them,— he at a loss to interpret her mood, she gazing at him contemplatively, with eyes that gradually filled.

"Oh, Paul!" she said a little sadly, "why are you not more like other men? It never occurred to me you would take that view of it. Please go now. You make it impossible for me to talk to you about it. I will write you — the rest."

He placed his arm around her and spoke soothingly: "Don't think of it any more, Lucy. Come, let us sit down. I want to tell you of a visit to the house last night with Barney Carruthers and Drewdie Poteet."

She slipped away from him and walked swiftly toward the door. When she reached Oxnard's crumpled letter on the carpet, she stopped, wrung her hands for a second, and then suddenly confronted Paul again, determination crystallized in look and tone.

"I have answered Mr. Oxnard's letter," she said defiantly.

"That was like you," he returned with a tender smile. "It was treating him with most charitable consideration, though he deserved none at all."

"I have answered that I would marry him," she continued in a high monotone.

Paul gazed at her curiously, with penetrating concentration. To hear Lucy Arnan jest on such a subject grated on him sensitively, and to see her mask her jest in such a simulation of seriousness stirred in him a vague foreboding.

But his scrutiny soon relaxed in a smile. "Don't you think you are a little cruel, Lucy Arnan," he said lightly, "to try to joke with me about such things?"

Her eyes fell, and her voice was lower as she replied, —

"I am not — trying to do that."

At last he was fully aroused, and he spoke imperatively.

"Lucy! What do you mean? What are you telling me?"

"Simply the truth. I shall marry Mr. Oxnard. I telegraphed him my consent to-day."

The words were deliberate; it was more as if she were soliloquizing than addressing Paul.

His compressed lips seemed faintly traced in chalk, but he made no motion except to throw back his head a little as he looked at her with a directness which she would not meet.

"I do not understand you," he said with the same directness.

She made a slight, deprecating gesture, dismissing the subject.

"There is no more to say," she replied with a touch of weariness. "I have spoken as plainly as I know how."

The pallor of his stern face was suddenly flooded by a dull red. The swollen veins were knotted purple. His eyes blazed, and he strode up to her and stood over her as though he would grind her beneath his heel.

She did not recede from him, but with one glance at his distorted face, bowed her head,

covering her eyes with her hand, and shuddering with an inarticulate exclamation.

He grasped her wrist and uncovered her eyes, her pulse, as he retained his grip, striking like a thong against his palm.

"Look at me!" he commanded.

Her eyes lifted to him as if against her will.

"You tell me that you are going to marry this man?"

"Yes," faintly, after a moment of waiting.

"You who were to marry me in forty-eight hours?"

There was no response.

"Speak!"

"Yes."

"And who confessed your love for me not ten minutes ago?"

"Yes."

His chest swelled with one great breath; his eyes left hers, looking beyond her vacantly; he dropped her wrist and walked silently past her to the door.

Before he could open it she had rushed to him and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Don't go like this, Paul Rodman!" she appealed and demanded. "Wait till you have heard all I have to say."

"Is it possible that there is anything more you would say?" he asked with a harsh restraint of his voice.

The suggestion of a smile flickered and died away around her lips, leaving, instead, lines like those which an exhausting vigil sometimes brings to the smoothest face.

"Paul," she said more softly, "we ought to be plain with each other now." She leaned forward, and taking the lapel of his coat between her fingers, toyed with it fondly, looking up to him as she spoke in a way that would have enslaved him five minutes before. "When you once think about it seriously, you will agree with me that we should not marry — now. I have nothing, and you have your way to make in the world. I should be a burden to you, and in time I fear you would come to feel it. I could not bear that."

"Ugh!" he scoffed roughly. "No more of that!"

"Don't let us be silly, Paul," she went on. "Life is a very different thing from what you have fancied it. I know this seems very — inconsiderate of me now — so near the — wedding, and people will talk horribly, but I shall suffer from that more than you, and —"

He turned from her in supreme disgust, and opening the door passed on into the hall, but she sprang after him and threw her arms around his neck.

"Listen! listen, Paul!" she panted.

He stood looking down at her, amazed at the transformation she had undergone in an instant. Every trace of weariness or hardness had left her. Her face had warmed to a delicate rose. Her eyes were slumberous fire, over which the lids drooped, like petals of a flower wilted by the heat. Her full, red lips were slightly parted, as if shaped to the fervid plea that had just left them. The quick respirations that made a tumult of her bosom seemed to undulate through every line of her sinuous figure. She swayed nearer to him; her breath brushed his cheek like a midday air from a swooning summer garden; a languorous fragrance ascended from the bruised violets at her breast. "Listen, Paul!" she murmured. "Let us be sensible. I love you! I shall always love you! What is — Judd Oxnard to us? Such men are necessary evils. Besides, he has heart trouble, and it will not be many years before I can be your wife."

Paul, for a little, was powerless to move or

speak. His color was like the swarthy pallor that results from lead poisoning. The hall was as close as a vault, and his one impulse was to get away, into the air.

Mechanically he unclasped her arms from about him, and, without looking toward her again, went slowly from the house.

IX

"THE BRAND OF A BURNT-OUT STAR"

HE stepped into the street and walked on automatically. All his mental faculties seemed locked. He had no acute sensation, either of anguish or wrath, regret or despair. He felt merely a numb, inert body, moving, through no exertion of his own, to no destination. An old dream which had repeated itself in his childhood came back to him, and, as in that, he was walking, freed from the law of gravitation, through space, and all other objects were stationary. He never knew that a policeman followed him half a square, and he was hardly conscious that a hack driver, who had come near running over him, pulled up and offered to take him home.

He went on and on for hours through this dead space until finally he found himself looking at the bronze soldier at the end of Third Street. He revolved idly a memory of having seen the same soldier once before that night,

followed by a dim phantasm of fields and trees. He laughed a little as he took the trouble to reason it out. Yes, he had passed the soldier earlier in the night and gone on into the country for his walk.

Leaving the monument now and returning along Third Street, he became more irritatingly observant. A bicyclist, speeding in from the boulevard, shot by, ladening the air with an abominable odor of lamp. A watchman, officiously whacking a wall with his club, had nothing better to do than to make the night hideous. The bumpkin half asleep on the gardener's wagon ought to be compelled to get down and take the place of the lame horse ahead, click-clicking interminably on the asphalt.

But when Paul finally reached his rooms he was mystified, on removing his hat, by the water which trickled from the brim. Looking through the window, he noticed for the first time a softly falling rain.

He took a chair by the open window and sat staring out at the needles of water glinting in the electric street-light. He stared one, two, three hours, until the rain ceased, a fresh breeze stirred, and the stars shone down.

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At last he moved, to lean forward suddenly and curiously; for here in the heart of the city floated to his ears the clear notes of a whippoorwill's call.

Then he remembered. Down the street was a jeweller's shop, in the window of which was a large clock that preceded the strokes of the hour with a musical simulation of the whippoorwill's cry. And he remembered more; for the stupor that had held him so long seemed to lift, leaving him on the old veranda of his boyhood's home, where he had lounged of an evening and dreamed his dreams of woman and love, while the refrain of a whippoorwill drifted to him from the thicket across the fields. And in one swift, infinity-illuming flash he spanned the distance between the song of the whippoorwill in the Tennessee copse to the song of the whippoorwill in the brazen clock. His head fell on his arms, stretched along the window-sill, and his whole frame was wrenched and contorted by a wordless groan of agony.

He shivered where he had fallen, for perhaps a minute, though in that time he lived over and over the beauty of his youth, the night's crash of his life, the hell of his future.

He rose to his feet and opened his lungs to the cool air of the nearing dawn.

Out from the stars a meteor shot, cleaving the night and dying in the graying east.

He turned away, and as his eyes fell on the wall of his room he saw stencilled upon it, in obedience to a law which sometimes affects the physically exhausted, the track of the meteor.

The same track, in pale rose, glowed in his eyes as he closed them.

"Barney's squab," he said aloud, with two notes of a self-mocking laugh, "and the brand of a burnt-out star."

Then he went up to the portrait of his long-dead mother, a girl whose soft hair, drawn in an old fashion smoothly over her ears, framed a face of ethereal delicacy and loveliness.

It was the only picture of a woman in the room; and opening his knife, he cut out the canvas and tore it into strips, which he dropped into a waste-basket.

X

A SUGGESTION FOR A PLAY

A SUPERFICIAL observer would have said that the next seven years wrought no greater change in Paul Rodman than such a period of time usually works in one of his age. Everybody remembered, of course, the "sensation" in which he had figured, — how heartlessly, and what was more impressive, how vulgarly, he had been jilted by Lucy Arnan for Judd Oxnard's money. But those less intimate with him than Barney Carruthers and Drewdie Poteet could not have said that his character had suffered any radical and lasting hurt from that experience. After the first shock had passed he appeared to the world as he had always appeared to it, — straightforward, unobtrusively active, quietly cheerful. He went about his business as before. He was seen as much in society as ever, and he continued to show, in his manner, at least, that deference to women which had been so nota-

bly a part of his heritage from "the Old South." If this deference had become more superficial than real, if its expression was now more the result of breeding than of feeling, no such accusation was put in words, and it could have been based on nothing more tangible, perhaps, than the intuition of the finer natures among those women who knew him both before and after his affair with Lucy Arnan.

In all these seven years since that affair Paul Rodman's name, in a city given to much small talk, had never been connected with that of another woman. He had shown no partiality for one above others, and had afforded the most watchful no cause for suspicion that he ever thought of installing another in the place in his life which Lucy Arnan had forfeited.

He was not a woman-hater; he was simply no longer a woman-worshipper. The sum of his philosophy regarding women was that, beginning with the utmost faith in them, he had now no faith in himself. He did not doubt that there were women who realized in every respect his youthful ideals, but he had lost all confidence in his ability to distinguish such women from their counterfeits. He had been deceived, completely and terribly, and

from the night on which he had destroyed his mother's picture he had no thought of risking a second deception. He regretted, often and acutely, the destruction of the picture, as a heartless and insane act. He had committed it in an hour when, in the bitterness of his soul, he had cursed all womankind as a weak and beautiful profanation of a divine idea — an hour whose poignancy passed, leaving him free of the injustice of estimating all women by the one he knew best. He did not assume a woman unworthy for no other reason than that she was a woman; nor, alas! did he now, as he once did, assume her worthy because she was a woman. He was simply and necessarily an agnostic as to the sex, and he was resolved never to invite the further penalties of disregarding his ignorance.

Thus keeping his place on the lower plane to which he had adjusted himself, and contemplating society from that plane alone, he saw much that confirmed not only the wisdom, but the necessity of his new philosophy. Men of his intense nature usually view their surroundings from one extreme or the other, and he was now as ready to suspect as before he had been to trust. And, of course, he often saw

more than there was to see. The social life of a city like Louisville has much in it to disenchant such a man as Paul Rodman had been, but it has more in it to mislead a warped judgment to unjust conclusions.

He had no difficulty in living down to this new philosophy concerning women. A winning face, a fine sympathy, a magnetic presence, or what seemed through an extended association an admirable and lovable character, had no power to move him from the non-committal course which he had prescribed for himself. All these he had seen, or had thought he saw, in Lucy Arnan. The only security for him was in memory.

But he did not obtrude these views even on his closest friends. Only once had he summarized them to Barney Carruthers, in this formula, —

"I am an ignoramus about women, and shall never try to be anything else."

Barney approved, and never again did he call Paul "Polly."

Lucy Arnan may not have made a woman-hater of Paul Rodman, but she had made one of Barney Carruthers.

"So help me God, Drewdie Poteet," he had

sworn the first time the two had talked over Lucy's infidelity to Paul, "I will never speak to another woman as long as I live!"

He had kept the oath in spirit, if not literally; which was not hard to do, for in his shyness he had probably never spoken to more than a dozen women outside his own family since he came into the world, and never to them when he could help it.

Though Barney and Drewdie often discussed Lucy Arnan and her influence on Paul Rodman's life, they never referred to her in his hearing, nor did he ever speak of that chapter of his past. It was not necessary that he should do so to reveal to them the ineradicable scar it had left. There were times when he revealed this so plainly when talking about other things that it spurred Barney Carruthers to renew and elaborate his oath against women as soon as he and Drewdie were alone together.

A crude instance of this will be sufficiently illustrative.

The three friends were in a restaurant one night, five or six years after Lucy Arnan's marriage to Judd Oxnard. They had been to the theatre, and Drewdie Poteet was seasoning

his oysters with lemon and lamentations over the inferiority of the play to his own "comedy-drama," *Love and Locksmiths*, which every manager in the country had declined. Drewdie had some time before decided, owing to the wholly inappreciative attitude of the publishers, that his Vocation was that of a dramatist instead of an author, and *Love and Locksmiths* was the result of that decision. Now that he had seen the French "rot" which had been put on by the very manager who had been most curt in rejecting *Love and Locksmiths*, Drewdie was so wrought up over the rank incompetence of the whole "managerial tribe" that he was committing the barbarity of supplementing the lemon on his oysters with tomato catsup and tabasco.

"Drewdie," remarked Paul, "you say your managers complain there is nothing original in *Love and Locksmiths*. I believe I can suggest something original. That play to-night was certainly not original in its mainspring, the treachery of a wife to her husband, — a French play without such a mainspring might be an originality, — but it was worked out with some new variations. The French are right in agreeing that there can be no stronger

motive for the human drama. But in France when a wife proves false they make a comedy or a farce, to be laughed at, or if they make a tragedy they pose her as the heroine. Over here, when we treat the situation seriously, we put the faithless wife in a melodrama and let her die in black, to slow music, in an atmosphere of spring flowers and wet handkerchiefs. Sometimes we let her come very near being killed by the husband, though usually we limit his bloodshedding to her masculine accomplice. In that we are getting pretty close to human nature. There is n't any doubt that when the right sort of a man is thus betrayed by his wife, his impulse is to kill somebody — unless we can find a variation for him — something original for the play. There is where my suggestion comes in."

Drewdie, who was now becalmed, glanced at Barney Carruthers significantly, while Barney, who had eaten his own oysters and was now attacking the over-seasoned plate which Drewdie had discarded, grunted, —

"Oh, shut up, Rod. When it comes to plays, Drewdie may not be able to strike the combination for the managers; but if he 's not a born playwright, he 's not going to be a

second-hand playwright, and you need n't try to teach him anything. Don't you know Drewdie Poteet and his vocation yet?"

"Let's see," Paul went on; "Green is a married man. He is all that a husband should be. One day, however, he discovers that Black is her favored lover. He gets a shot-gun, double-barrelled, and walks in on them while they are together. Does he shoot them down at once? He does not wish to soil his hands with the slaughter of such creatures, — to say nothing of furnishing Drewdie something original for his play. Black is not armed, or if he is, Green has the drop on him and compels him to surrender his pistol or knife. Green locks the door and thus passes sentence on the two:

"'I am not going to kill you, unless that is your choice.

"'Here are the alternatives, —

"'First, I will shoot you both down where you stand; or —

"'Second, One of you — it is immaterial which — must die here and now by the hands of the other.

"'If neither of you is willing to be killed by the other in order that the other may live, then you may fight it out between you until one of

you is dead. The survivor, if there be a survivor, goes free of any further molestation by me.

"'I will add that when I say one of you must die *by the hands* of the other I mean that literally. You will be allowed no weapons.'"

Drewdie Poteet, who was leaning over the table writing in a note-book, looked up suddenly.

"You don't mean one would have to strangle the other?" he asked.

"I suppose that would be what would happen, unless they could find some other way to do the work."

"But — stop — don't you see that would almost make it certain that the woman would be the one killed?"

Paul laughed slightly. "That is the beauty of the plan," he answered. "If only one is to be killed, the woman should be the one."

Drewdie swabbed his face with his handkerchief as he replaced the note-book in his pocket.

"What do you think of the idea, fellows?" Paul added.

"I don't know, Rod," Drewdie ruminated. "It strikes me different ways. But it strikes

me hardest that it would be a stunner for a horrible play, or story, or something."

Barney Carruthers, who had been meditatively lighting and watching burn a stand of matches, thus gave his opinion,—

"It seems to me that it would depend on how it was worked up whether it turned out a 'something' or something else."

As they left the restaurant Barney Carruthers and Drewdie Poteet went on outside while Paul lingered to pay the bill.

"Ain't seen the cuss look that way for some time," Barney said as they waited. "Did you notice that old, hell-baked smile of his come back as he spoke of the woman?"

"Did it? I was too busy trying to get the thing on paper."

"Say, Drewdie Poteet," and Barney struck his fist viciously against the iron awning-post, "I 'm willing to take a double-and-twisted oath with you that if either one of us ever looks at another woman, he is to be buried alive by the other."

XI

ACROSS THE YEARS

IN the early weeks of the second summer after this incident, Barney Carruthers induced Paul Rodman to go back to Tennessee with him for a vacation. Barney's father was still living, and the Louisville lawyer, whose business had never engrossed his time, was in the habit of visiting the old gentleman occasionally, when the peaches were ripening and the roasting ears were silking. Paul, having no ties of blood or of close friendship in Tennessee, had never returned to the State since he had left it as a youth, now more than ten years ago, and had always declined Barney's invitation to run down with him to a country "where they know how to make real chicken-pie and sure-enough corn-bread." This summer, however, Paul was more amenable to reason. He admitted that he needed just such a rest as Barney urged him to take.

His work for several months had been unusually arduous. He had been trying to get under way a company to place on the market a deposit of fluor-spar in one of the river counties of Kentucky, and he had gone through a hard fight. The industry was a comparatively new one in that part of the country, and capitalists were wary of it. Nevertheless, with an option on the land, he applied himself to raising the money necessary to buy it and to put the enterprise on foot. It was here that the friends he had made in his business of home-building came forward. That business had never proved very profitable to Paul, chiefly on account of his laxness in holding his tenants to their contracts. If they defaulted in their payments, it was his way to allow them extensions, even indefinitely, rather than enforce his liens on their homes.

"You ought to get out of that business, Rod," Barney Carruthers would say to him. "You 'll never do anything for yourself in it. You 're too soft-hearted. No mortal man can run the real estate business and the philanthropy business together and make money out of the real estate business."

But Paul found that his real estate business

served him a good turn when he undertook to float the stock of his new company. Not all his tenants defaulted in their payments, and not all those who defaulted failed ultimately to redeem their contracts. Many not only paid for their homes, but in doing so formed the habit of saving and laid by snug little bank accounts. When Paul set about organizing the Ohio River Fluor-spar Company, the small subscriptions which these men were eager to make to its stock, together with his own larger subscription and the still larger subscription of Drewdie Poteet, who had now suceeeded to his mother's fortune, constituted the greater part of the capital with which the option was closed and active work on the new enterprise begun.

Having done all there was for him to do in person just then, Paul found himself with a few weeks' respite at the time when Barney Carruthers made his annual pilgrimage to Tennessee, and he decided, to Barney's hilarious satisfaction, to visit with him the scenes of their boyhood.

Barney Carruthers was so elated by this decision that he telegraphed it to Drewdie Poteet at St. Louis, insisting on his joining

them in Tennessee, although it was a foregone conclusion that Drewdie would not be able to spare the time to do it. Drewdie now had a new vocation which kept him very busy from May to October. His mother had died shortly after he had taken down those notes of Paul Rodman's suggestion for a play, and Drewdie, coming into the property, had been quick to realize that the dramatist's was not his true Vocation in Life. His true Vocation in Life was to encourage the breeding interest by helping to elevate the turf; and having invested in a racing stable, he had now reached St. Louis, on the " circuit," where, as his reply to Barney's telegram amply indicated, he was actively engaged in encouraging the breeding interest and elevating the turf: —

" Awfully sorry. Can't possibly get away. My busy season. You and Rod get down strong on *Doublequick* in handicap to-morrow. Dead to rights. Copper-riveted. Tapioca."

On the June morning when Paul Rodman took the southern train it was with none of the exhilarating anticipations with which men of his temperament often set out to renew the long-abandoned associations of their youth.

On the contrary, in the lapses of silence between him and Barney Carruthers, Paul's thoughts were heavy as they insistently recurred to the contrast between the journey he had made over this road more than ten years ago and the journey he was making over it now. Then, an inexperienced lad in his early twenties, life was before him, everything was possible, and the best and most beautiful were to be his. Now, a worldly-wise man, though not yet thirty-five, he knew that nothing that was best and most beautiful was possible for him; that his return to the haunts of his boyhood was with the stern realization that the hopes and aspirations which had buoyed him forth and which had been the most wonderful charm of his boyhood, were only mockeries. In truth, what was there of those boyhood hopes and aspirations that were not better buried in the old family graveyard, along with the aged father whose death had marked the beginning of the new life of the son, and with the young mother whose desecrated portrait had marked the ending of all that was worth living for?

The miles slipped away; the wooded slopes vanished behind him; the green "barrens" rolled on either side; then a river winding

between swaying wheat and roistering corn. Everywhere the landmarks were recognizable, but nowhere were they the landmarks which had lined his way on that other journey. Then all were invested with the magic, the mystery that light the first vision outward bound; now they were but dull clod, dead stone, sluggish water, that numbered the miles as he drifted, as dull as they, aimlessly back.

It was nearing dusk when he and Barney reached Mavistoc. But it was not the Mavistoc he had left ten years before. Much of it was familiar, but much of it was aggressively incongruous with his memory of the quiet old town which for generations had hardly varied in its physical aspect, except perhaps for a scar now and then left by a fire or warring armies, and for the growth of new rows of saplings into trees.

Paul had hardly stepped from the train before he noted that the great cottonwood that had stood immemorially near the station had disappeared, and with it the little cabin it had shaded, in the door of which — a hole in a swaying plank fence — old Juniper the shoemaker, black and bent, had plied his trade and his tireless tongue, while Randy, his wife, sat

under the tree outside and displayed for sale her gingerbread and fried chicken; the family grandchildren and great-grandchildren, the family dogs and fowls, overrunning the adjacent territory and wearing it smooth and hard with many bare feet. Old Juniper and Randy had been part of Paul's childhood, and the distance between him and that seemed suddenly and violently lengthened as he saw a big lumber-yard where the cottonwood and the cabin had stood. Further along the creek, which in the old days had been given over to the municipality's ducks, geese, cattle, and washerwomen, mills now hummed and coal-banks stretched. The street from the station, which had been dedicated to dog-fennel and an occasional squatter, was now graded and gravelled, and was built up with neat cottages. The old corner gaslights had been replaced with electricity. There were an added story and a tower to the historic court-house. The little ivy-grown church that he had known best had been remodelled into market stalls, and the sleepers in the grass-grown churchyard adjoining had been removed elsewhere, to make room for the thriving innovation known as the "Ten Cent Store." The colonial

simplicity of the old Hungerford homestead, which was almost coeval with the birth of Mavistoc, and which had never been occupied except by some member of the family that had won distinction for Mavistoc, in the councils of the State and the Nation and in the courts of Europe, had been wigged and rouged into the simpering rejuvenation of "The Hotel Hungerford," with a clerk's desk where the hall had been and vociferous runners who had besieged Paul the moment he appeared on the car platform. As he drove along the principal street he saw that many of the houses had been enlarged and modernized; yards he remembered as wild with old-fashioned flowers were now prim with palms and ferns, and at the sides of two cottages where hollyhocks and tiger-lilies had rioted, glass conservatories had been built. There were new houses where cultivated fields had been when Paul had last seen the town; most of these structures having discarded the plainness of their antiquated neighbors, many for a combination of all schools of architecture that promised a complicated and showy result, and some for the best models of urban dwellings which modern taste and wealth have evolved.

"Some of these houses along here could hold their own on Third Street in Louisville, could n't they?" Barney Carruthers said as he pointed out the improvements on either hand. "They have become so progressive in Mavistoc since you and I left that they have actually introduced coppers into circulation."

When they drove from the town over the smooth turnpike, the changes were hardly less conspicuous. The rail snake-fences had given place to plank, wire, and occasionally to stone. The fields which had been planted in cotton or turned out to broomsedge and blackberries, were now luxuriant in stock-peas, in grain and in blue grass, over which blooded cattle and horses browsed. Only occasionally did a patch of cleanly tilled cotton remind Paul that this was Middle Tennessee instead of Central Kentucky.

It was certainly very different from the Tennessee he had known; and the change, however for the better it might have been, struck him with a sense of personal loss. Neither his boyhood, nor even the land of his boyhood, was left him.

They passed the mouth of a lane that led away from the pike, and Barney waved his hand toward it.

"I reckon you recognize that," he said.

It was the lane that ran to the old Rodman place, the only home Paul had ever known. He could see now, against the afterglow in the western sky, the dark green blur of the great oaks and hickories under which the house stood; he could see, as of old, the swallows wheeling above it; and a commotion in the branches of the big cedar told him that the turkeys were flying to roost in the same tree they had always chosen ten, twenty years ago.

The house was invisible from the turnpike, but Paul's mental image of it, at the moment, was vivid, and especially of the wide veranda on which two dreamers sat and watched the stars come out, — one, a white-haired old man; the other, a grave-eyed boy. The man had died long ago, gently, contentedly, as becomes the ending of a beautiful old age; and the boy, too, was gone, but the pathos of his going was far removed from the definiteness of inexorable death; for it was as if the boy had been, and even now was, and yet was not.

There was a tightening at his throat as Paul, with a strange, impersonal aloofness, contemplated the picture of the boy he had been, and his heart welled with a tender yearning, an

infinite compassion, not for himself, but for the boy who for the instant was very real, and yet who was no more.

He turned away from the darkening tree-tops with a forced conventionality.

"We 'll have to run over some day and take a look at the old place."

"That 's what!" replied Barney Carruthers. "And I reckon we 'll both know the way."

XII

DIVISION VALLEY

STEPHEN CARRUTHERS, Barney's father, was an old man who since the death of his wife had lived alone, in preference to living with his married children, or having them live with him. He was taciturn and active, always pottering at something and rarely accomplishing anything. He devoted his energies to trifles and whimsies, and directed two or three negroes to the same end; the result being that he supplied his physical wants and was content, while his farm went happily to weeds and thickets. He had very little to say to Barney or Paul, but it pleased him to listen to what they had to say, either to himself or to each other, provided they accompanied him on his rounds to the barns or the fields to say it.

That was how Barney and Paul spent the greater part of the day following their arrival. The next morning old Stephen took Barney

into Mavistoc for a consultation with a lawyer, and Paul lounged away the time under the trees till the afternoon, when he started with a gun to the woods of Division Valley, where, in the old days, he had rarely hunted squirrels unsuccessfully.

Division Valley, so called because through it ran the creek which marked the boundaries between the Carruthers, Rodman, and several other farms, was a wild bit of woodland which, being subject to overflows, had never known the clearer's axe. It had been the favorite haunt of Paul as a boy, and he had been familiar, as only a boy could be, with every tree, bowlder, and sink-hole in it, every turn and shoal and pool of the little stream.

This afternoon he beat his way leisurely through Stephen Carruthers' pasture, studded with thorn and sassafras and matted with dewberries. Beyond this he crossed Stephen's cornfield, and then a strip given over to briers and bushes. He was on the edge of Division Valley now, the dense woods spreading before him, the blue of the sky bending to the green of the forest, and white cirrus flakes floating like thistle between. Across these reaches of luminous blue and green came the resonant

calls of blackbirds, and behind, in the fields, a solitary meadow-lark answered with a trill vibrant with the pulse of summer.

Paul came to the creek where as a boy he had been accustomed to cross on the stones when the water was low. But an uprooted tree bridged it now. He stepped upon its trunk and paused. He ought to know that tree. He took his bearings critically. Yes, it was the sweet-gum, — the biggest sweet-gum in the forest, — and the long breath which he drew across the years was laden with the resinous fragrance of this fallen landmark of his youth. He walked over it slowly, with a half-conscious feeling that he was profaning the dead.

Idly he followed the bank of the creek. Here was the swimming-hole, wide and deep, just as he remembered it; then the swift race, spreading with frothy shallows; after which was the long stretch, waist-deep, where he and Barney Carruthers had always come to seine minnows when the elders required bait. This ended in the wonderful loop, where the stream doubled on itself for an eighth of a mile, and here was the sycamore whose roots on one side were washed by the same water which,

after making the whole quarter-mile circuit, washed its roots on the other side, then to plunge and brawl down the rocky steep known as "the falls." And here was the widening bed of clean gravel and smooth limestone, over which the clear water spread, and slipped through a glade of majestic trees, the green sward dotted with dandelions and sorrel, and clusters of May-apple rising above the drifts of other summers' dead leaves.

Paul threw himself down on the curled root of a beech-tree, with a sigh of satisfaction as if it were an easy-chair to whose once abandoned comfort he was returning. It was yesterday, it seemed to him, that he had last sat here, a happy lad, with his back against this beech and his gun across his knees. Then, as now, the mulberry-tree beyond the elm was hung with pink fruit, and he had waited here the coming of the squirrels for their favorite delicacy. Then, as now, the June breeze lazily lifted the leaves of the poplar beside the mulberry, and, through the sun-rifted foliage of the beech, the dandelions' sprites seemed to flit down and dance airily around them on the grass. Then, too, there was the balsam of loam and wood and sun in his breath, while

the drone of the falls, flowing like a distant river into the restless, restful, infinite sea of the forest's mysterious undertones, soothed his senses with subtle harmonies. Then a woodpecker had tapped, tapped, on the dead tip of the poplar, and so distinctly was the sound even now a part of his sensation that it was with almost surprise that he looked up to the tip of the poplar and saw no sign of the bird.

And not less distinct was the sudden revivification now of the dream which had come to him here on that afternoon long ago, when he had yielded to the spell of the hour and dropped into a doze, — a dream of a brown, witching face that peered at him through the leaves, out of eyes that laughed and darkened with mingling gladness and tenderness; a hand that had been held out to him with the joy of one who had been waiting for him forever, with the benison of one for whom he had waited forever; to clasp which he had sprung triumphantly, to wake and find only the dandelions' sprites still dancing and the woodpecker still tapping.

How well he remembered the quiver and ecstasy of that waking moment; the exalta-

tion of the thrilling presence that lingered long after the dream had fled, and crowned him with the fulness of the blossoming future! A squirrel had swung into the mulberry's branches, and catching sight of the boy had darted to the other side of the mulberry's trunk, whence it peered around warily at the creature who had waited to kill it. But Paul, smiling, had watched it with never a motion of his gun. He would not have harmed any living thing at that moment, and it was not long before the squirrel had given a signal of its own and was joined by a partner in the mulberry, where they regaled themselves without further fear of the wood-nymph's mate who sat at the foot of the beech-tree.

The wood-nymph's mate had finally drawn his knife and laughingly cut his initials and the date in the smooth bark of the beech. It was a date worth commemorating, and he had underscored it with a deep line, carving opposite it a similar line above which he had left space for other initials and another date. Some beautiful day, when he had found his wood-nymph out in the great world of men, he had meant to bring her here and tell her of his dream, when the other initials and a date

still more worthy of commemoration should be added.

He remembered this caprice of boyish sentiment now, and turned to see if the tree still bore the traces of it.

Yes. There were the rude letters, *P. R.*, and the date. But over the second line he had cut were letters which he had never seen there before, — *M. C.*, — and a date five years subsequent to his own. He did not know who *M. C.* was. Perhaps she was the girl of his dream. He smiled as he reverted to his folly, and turned away with a half-amused, half-impatient exclamation, bringing himself abruptly to shake off this spell of his lost youth. He picked up his gun and looked about him for some living target. There were no squirrels in the mulberry, but a crow alighted on the dead top of the poplar, and, with a folding and refolding of its wings three times, cocked its head to one side, peering toward an elm fifty feet away, and emitting a peculiar little call, — a cautious but friendly "ca-aw!" of a short note followed by a longer. Then it flew off suddenly, making a wide circle of perhaps two hundred yards and returning to the poplar, to go through

precisely the same motion of the wings and give the same call. Again it repeated this manœuvre, and Paul fancied he heard somewhere in the air a soft, cooing answer, that might have come, after all, on a stronger breeze from the running water. Then the crow discovered him and with a sharp signal of alarm shot away from its perch. But Paul was too quick for it. His gun rang out, the bird tumbled limply to the ground, and the air was pierced with an "Oh!" of horror and indignation from a human throat. There was a wild commotion in the branches of the elm; looking up, Paul saw a nondescript flutter of brown and white from the elm to the interlacing black-jack beneath it, and two seconds later there flamed down on him, from between the fork in the black-jack tree, a pair of red-brown eyes under a tangle of red-brown hair, framed by a brown and white checked sunbonnet.

"You monster!" was hurled down at him like a veritable brand from the flaming eyes.

Paul stood staring up in amazement at the odd apparition.

"Why — what — where in the world did you come from?" he laughed lamely.

"You murd — oh-h-h!" She cut her epithets short; there was a long-drawn, diminishing exclamation of surprised recognition; a longer pause while she gazed at him with steady eyes from which the anger slowly died. "Why, it's Mr. Paul," she added.

"Yes," he replied inanely, for he had no remembrance of having seen her before; "how do you do?"

The wild-strawberry lips — he decided at once that was the kind of lips they were — curved in a smile, and the sunbonnet bobbed amiably to him between the fork of the blackjack.

"How do you do?" she repeated.

Then her chin dropped into her hand and she studied him contemplatively.

"I *did* know you," she said, as if to convince herself, "as soon as I had a good look at you."

Paul thought if he could see more of her he might get some suggestion as to her identity.

"May n't I help you down?" he asked. "Or am I to come up?"

"You are to do neither one," she smiled, "until you put down that horrid gun."

Paul laughed and laid his gun on the grass.

"No! no! take it away off!" she ordered. "Go and set it against the beech-tree yonder."

"Your commands shall be obeyed, your Highness," picking up the gun; then with mock severity, "Shoulder arms!"

"Forward, march!" rang at him from the black-jack tree.

With his back to the black-jack, he marched to the beech and stood the gun against it. Then facing the black-jack again, he looked up, only to find that the sunbonnet had vanished.

"Hello!" he called.

There was a ripple of laughter from the foot of the black-jack, and his eyes, following the sound, fell on the owner of the sunbonnet standing by the tree, while a shaking grape-vine that climbed to the lower branches told him what had happened.

"Well!" he exclaimed in his surprise.

There was a bewitching play of blushes and dimples under the sunbonnet now, and Paul allowed his eyes to linger on it without diverting them by any other exertion, mental or physical. Then he demanded of them that suggestion which was to recall to him where he had seen her. But if there was any clue,

he inferred, it was hidden by the sunbonnet. All that he could be sure of was that she was a mere girl, with the slenderness and grace of a child rather than of a woman; say, fourteen — perhaps fifteen — years old. That much was indicated by the short skirt that barely reached to the shoe-tops, as well as by the exquisite freshness of so much of the face as was revealed by the sunbonnet. He had now decided that there were not only ripe wild strawberries, but the daintiest of wild strawberry blossoms, under the same sunbonnet.

It was hardly more than three seconds that they stood confronting each other thus. Then he started toward her, and she met him with outstretched hand and unaffected friendliness in her greeting.

"I'm ever so glad to see you back, Mr. Paul — Mr. Rodman," she corrected, as he took her hand. "We got a glimpse of you when you and Mr. Carruthers drove through Mavistoc the other day."

Paul was a little annoyed that he did not recognize her. But she seemed to know him so well, and so plainly took it for granted that he knew her as well, that he studiously avoided

any risk of embarrassing her, child though she was, by betraying his ignorance.

"And I'm downright sorry," he replied, "that I displeased you so by shooting the crow."

Instantly her face clouded and her voice softened.

"Poor Nick!" she said. "I must find him. Maybe he was only hurt."

"He fell over here," Paul answered soberly, leading the way toward the poplar.

But the girl's hope was vain. Nick was dead. They found him on the grass, his wings half outstretched, as if in benediction, over the earth which had been his enemy.

Paul touched him with his foot, but the girl, shrinking as if a blow had been aimed at herself, gave a little cry of pained protest and sank to her knees beside the bird, stroking it gently.

"Dear Nick!" she murmured. "And this would never have happened if he had not believed in me."

"Really, I feel dreadfully mean about it, but I did n't know he was your friend."

She looked up at Paul steadily, and for a second he was not sure that indignation was

not again kindling in her eyes. But it was with an intonation of reproach rather than anger that she said, —

"You killed him just to be killing something. That 's the way of men."

Paul could not help smiling at this grave reproof of an unknown child.

"I suppose it 's a way that was born with us, my dear," he answered apologetically.

A wave of crimson swept over her face, and she gazed at him curiously. Then she rose to her feet, the sunbonnet now concealing her deepened color, and walked slowly from him.

Paul, measuring her height again, concluded that perhaps she *was* too tall to be addressed as "my dear."

"Besides," he called to her, "I was brought up to kill crows as a duty."

"Have you a knife?"

There was something peculiar about her voice now. He had a suspicion that she was laughing. She was still walking away from him and she still wore that sunbonnet.

"Yes," he replied.

"Then sharpen a big, strong stick and come here."

She stopped under the elm and waited,

while he, more than willing to retrieve himself in her good opinion, if he had shown too little consideration for the dignity of her years, silently obeyed.

"Nick was born in this tree," she said when Paul came up with the young hickory shoot which he had cut; "this would be the best place to bury him, don't you think?"

"Oh — um — yes, why, of course."

"You might dig the grave here, I believe," indicating the particular spot with her toe.

Paul went to work and gouged out what he considered a good enough grave for a crow.

"That will do very nicely," he said, desisting.

"Oh, no! It must be twice, three times as deep as that."

It was warm, and before he made it three times as deep he wished that he might pull off his coat. But he decided not to risk it, for she seemed taller than ever as she stood by so seriously and watched his labors.

She brought Nick and laid him in the grave; then she covered him with May-apple leaves, and replaced the earth over him gently. As she declined Paul's offer of assistance, it was his turn now to stand by and watch. He determined that to the end of the cere-

mony he, too, would be serious. Once she looked up at him quickly, he thought a little defiantly, as if she divined his effort to maintain a straight face, and the glimpse he had of her eyes left an impression of unshed tears. It was a capricious little creature, he decided. One minute he was not sure she was not laughing; the next he was not sure she was not crying.

When she had finished she rose and turned calmly to Paul.

"I must go now," she said. "Of course you will come over soon."

"Of course!" He did not know why "of course," but he would make an effort at once to find out who she was. "I'm going your way now, if you don't object," he added, picking up his gun.

Was she blushing again? And why that swiftly stolen glance at her shoes?

But she did not say she objected, and the two started off together.

Before they had walked fifty yards she stopped in front of a little bluff.

"The darlings!" she cried, looking up at the wild roses growing on its ledges. "Are n't they beautiful?"

Indeed they were! Paul, turning his eyes from the bluff to the sunbonnet, decided that he had been wrong about the strawberry blossoms. They were wild roses.

"Wait and let me get you some," he told her.

"Do you think you could?" she asked in delight.

"I've climbed that bluff many a time," he assured her confidently.

He scrambled up it, though it was much more difficult now, and he carefully chose the freshest and daintiest roses to be found. Then he scrambled down to the bushes where he had left the girl and his gun.

"Here they are," he panted.

There was no answer. The gun remained, but the girl was invisible.

"Hello!" he called out.

She did not reply. The undergrowth was thick, and he could see only a few feet ahead of him. Beyond the bluff a path followed the creek and another crossed the stream. He took the latter, toward the Carruthers' farm, but he did not come upon the girl again.

"The little rascal!" he laughed. "She went as suddenly as she came."

XIII

"DONE COME HOME"

WHEN Paul tried to describe her at the supper-table that night neither Barney nor Stephen Carruthers could identify her from the description.

"There are flocks of children like that living around Division Valley, Rod," Barney declared.

"Maybe it was one of Nelse Quigley's daughters," Stephen ventured, "though I don't reckon any of his is fourteen years old. He 's got a yard full, and most of them seem to be about ten. Nelse's favorite complaint is that all his young Quigleys are girls and all his young Jerseys are boys."

More than a week later Paul walked over to the farm that had once been his home. He had deferred this visit because the old place, as he remembered it, was the one remaining link with his youth, and he shrank a little from returning to it, to find, perhaps, that even that,

after the changing years, existed only in his memory.

When he came to the lane by which the house was reached from the turnpike he stopped to read a sign painted on a board:

"*Private.*
Peddlers, Tramps, and Politicians Keep Out."

He might call this, he thought, the first of the innovations he was to see. Barney Carruthers had told Paul of this board; he had also told him of certain queer hieroglyphics on the board which had been contributed by nomads, and which informed all other nomads that the warning was a good one to disregard. "Cousin Jo," the present owner of the Rodman place, insisted that he was "cousin of the county," and the peddlers, tramps, and politicians, according to Barney, were not to be barred from the cousinship, but only laughed when they read the sign, as they followed the lane directly to Cousin Jo's.

Proceeding over the familiar path at the side of the dirt road, Paul soon saw that the "spirit of progress," whose evidences were so conspicuous along the turnpike, had not penetrated the lane. Here was the group of wal-

nut-trees, five of them now as in the days when his father so often threatened to cut them down to make more room; here was the same wild cherry in the fence corner, and here the undisturbed ranks of dock and pokeweed.

He caught a glimpse of the house through the trees, and for a moment a haze hung before his eyes. Whatever Cousin Jo had or had not done, he had not "improved" the old mansion after the fashion in Mavistoc.

As Paul turned an elbow of the lane into full view of the premises, his face lit with surprise and pleasure. In his first sweeping survey he did not notice a single change. Everything seemed just as he had last seen it, as if that had been days instead of years ago. He stopped at the gate, and before entering scanned every point of the dear old picture. There was the gravelled way, winding over the rolling lawn up to the long, low steps of the veranda, that extended the width of the house, the big fluted columns wreathed, as of old, with climbing roses. There, at each end of the veranda, were the luxuriant ellipsoids of trellised honeysuckle, flaunting many-hued trumpets that summoned from far the winged

seekers of sweets. And there, into the heart of the sheltering vines, was a flash of dun and white, and Paul knew that the mocking-birds still built their nests where they had built them year after year during all his boyhood. Not a spreading oak or towering hickory was missing; and still overhanging a gable of the house was the great maple whose branches at his own window had tapped him to sleep many a night. In the rear the kitchen was partially visible, and he saw that the doorway was framed in Aunt Viny's growing gourds, as it had been when she was the presiding genius of that establishment. Further back was the rustic sweep of the well, beyond which was the moss-covered spring-house, just as he had last seen them.

He opened the gate and walked toward the wide hall-doors, which stood invitingly ajar. But before he reached the steps there was a burst of girlish laughter from some one who was not in sight, and in another second a mischievous puppy, shaking a checked cotton apron in his mouth, darted around the corner of the house and scampered across the lawn, pursued laboriously by an old negro woman, who almost ran against Paul before she saw him.

"My lan'!" she panted, "I did n't know dey wuz vis'tors. Walk right in, suh, en I 'll go fine Mahs Jo."

"Howdy, Aunt Viny," Paul smiled; "don't you know me?"

"Who dat call me Aunt Viny lak dat? I ain't heerd dat voice sence — lemme git a good look at you, chile!" She came nearer, batting her eyes. "'Tain't — 'fo' Gawd! da's who 't is!" She turned toward the house and cried out joyously: "Mahs Jo! Miss Madge! run yere quick! Yere 's Mr. Paul done come home!"

Then, wrinkled with delight, she faced Paul again. "Bless de Lawd, Mr. Paul, I gwine shake yo' han' wunst mo' 'f I draps dead de nex' bref!" wiping her hand on her skirt. "Gwawn 'way f'm yere, dawg!"

The puppy, having dropped the apron in order to return and inspect the new-comer, was now making frantic overtures to establish friendly relations with him, but Aunt Viny pushed the dog aside and grasped Paul's outstretched hand.

"My lan', Mr. Paul," she exclaimed, "Ize powerful glad to set eyes on you wunst mo'! I sutny is!"

"And I'm just as glad to see you again, Aunt Viny," Paul replied heartily. "But I did n't expect it. I did n't know you were living here now."

"Who, me? Whah you 'low I wuz livin' at, Mr. Paul? You done sole yo' sheer er de ole place, but I ain't nuvver sole mine. No, suh! Yere I wuz bawned, en yere I gwine die, bless de Lawd!"

Paul smiled. "I might have known that. I remember you always owned the biggest share of the place, anyway, Aunt Viny."

"Go 'long now, Mr. Paul!" the old woman laughed in a high key, swaying over till her hand rested on her thigh. "You ain't changed a bit. You des lak you wuz when you useter joke en carry on scan'lous wid ole Viny."

"Aunt Viny! Oh, it's Mr. Rodman! How do you do?"

The speaker was a young woman who stood at the corner of the house around which the puppy had first appeared.

Paul lifted his hat and almost stammered, "Good-morning," although it was five o'clock in the afternoon. It was certainly the little girl he had met in Division Valley, but, with-

out the sunbonnet and the short skirts, a very different, and, coming upon him so suddenly, a somewhat disconcerting, person. Instead of fourteen, she was fully twenty—perhaps a year or two older.

She started, smiling, toward him, while he in his astonishment stood staring at her like a veritable gawk. She went up to him and gave him her hand.

"I'm so glad you have come," she said; "and Cousin Jo and Aunt Mildred will be delighted. They were wondering to-day why you had n't been over."

"Thank you," he managed to say. "You're very kind. I—er—intended calling before this, but somehow—"

Aunt Viny unconsciously came to his relief: "He ain't changed a bit, is he, Miss Madge, cep'n he's growed some en des natchully improved?"

They both laughed, and Aunt Viny started away. "You tek keer uv him, Miss Madge; I reckon I better go git my ap'on, ef dat Piff lef' any uv it to git. Say, Mr. Paul," pausing and turning toward him again, "do you still love dem same kinder biscuits you useter eat so many uv?"

"Yes, Aunt Viny; but I don't get any up where I live."

"I lay you don't! Dem folks gotter be bawned ag'in 'fo' dey kin mek dem biscuits. Ne'mine, Mr. Paul, I gwiner cook you ernough fer supper t'night to mek you feel sho you done got home ag'in."

"Thank you, Aunt Viny, but I shall not have time to stay to supper to-night," Paul laughed.

"Everybody has time at Cousin Jo's," the girl interposed. "You do the cooking, Aunt Viny, and I 'll answer for Mr. Rodman."

"Yes, honey, I boun' you will! Dey ain't no gittin' roun' her, Mr. Paul. Whut she done said she done said. Come on yere, Piff, you outdacious varmint!" she called to the dog. "Dey gotter be chickens ketched fer supper."

Paul gave the girl a frankly puzzled look.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," he said. "I did n't know you lived here."

"Did n't you?" she answered, with a suggestion of airy protest in her tone. "I came here soon after you went away. Perhaps you never heard of it."

"No, I — had n't heard of it.'

They were walking toward the house, and the hopelessly blank expression that settled on Paul's countenance caused the girl to stop abruptly.

"I — don't — believe — you — know — who — I — am!" she said solemnly, eying him with amazement. "I — don't — believe — you — remember — me — at — all!"

He laughed weakly. "I certainly remember your running away from me in Division Valley the other day."

"But you don't remember me before that?"

There was smiling confession in his eyes. It would have been useless now for him to try to dissemble further.

"Oh! oh-h-h!" laughing faintly in mock dismay, though the blush which she failed to hide by pressing her hands to her cheeks showed that her agitation was not wholly affected. "You did n't know me at all that day in the Valley! And I never suspected you did n't, and treated you all the time in the friendliest way! But you *did* know that I knew you, did n't you? And you did know that I thought you knew me?"

"Oh, yes; I knew that. But there is one excuse for my ignorance: you see you had n't

been pointed out to me shortly before in Mavistoc, as I had been pointed out to you."

"That's so!" dwelling on the newness of the idea. "And it never even occurred to me before."

They were walking again toward the house, and she tripped a few yards to one side to pull a pink from a bunch over which a humming-bird was poised. The bird flitted away, hardly more than an arm's length, suspending itself in the air until she left the flowers, when it flew back to its spoil. To Paul it seemed that the bird and the girl not only understood each other, but that each suggested the other.

With the same aerial grace with which she had left his side she returned, fluttering the pink to her lips. Like the bird, she seemed almost to suspend herself in the air as she suddenly paused before she reached him.

"The horror of it!" she exclaimed, with a recurrence of the tone of only partially affected concern. "To think of being in the woods all the afternoon with a man who didn't know me! Why, we haven't been introduced at this moment!"

"Won't you perform that ceremony?"

She made him a slight courtesy.

"Mr. Rodman, let me present you — oh, bother! Paul Rodman, don't you remember Madge Cabanis?"

"Madge Cabanis?" rubbing his chin reflectively.

"The little girl you used to call Chucklehead?"

His face brightened instantly.

"Oh!" he cried. "Doctor Cabanis' little daughter?"

"Yes."

"The little girl I used to see so often when I rode by to and from Mavistoc?"

"Of course."

"And the last time I saw her was the day I passed on my way to take the train for Louisville, and she was hanging on the gate to say good-bye to me!"

"She would never do it again, Mr. Paul Rodman!"

He came toward her impulsively, his hand outstretched.

"We must shake hands on this."

She barely brushed his hand with the tips of her fingers, and on the failure of his effort to grasp them was away, toward the house again, with a laugh.

"A bird in the bush!" he called after her.

"I'll wait till I see if you remember me next time, before I shake hands with you."

They went into the hall, where they found Mrs. Cabanis — "Aunt Mildred," as Madge had called her — placidly sewing, and where they sat and chatted for half an hour, during which Paul learned that Madge Cabanis had made her home here since the death of her father, ten years before. It was a pleasant half-hour to Paul, with the gentle voice of Mrs. Cabanis and the laughter of Madge making musical the fitful breezes that played from the honeysuckles and roses through the hall.

After that, guided by Madge, dancing now in front of him and now walking at his side, he strolled about the grounds, — stopping by the well to lower the creaking sweep, and asking permission to drink from the bucket, "just for the taste of it once more;" stooping at the spring and breaking off a sprig of the aromatic mint, which he stuck in his buttonhole; passing through the orchard, where the first peaches were ripening, and insisting on climbing one of the trees, to see if he had "forgotten how," and to pluck from the topmost boughs an offering of the fruit; then

idling down the elder-bordered path to the old Rodman graveyard; and returning to the house through the woodland pasture, along the creek where in season the snipe and the silver-sides had never failed him.

Long before they were in speaking distance of the house they saw Cousin Jo Cabanis standing on the back porch, waving a salutation to them with his hand. Cousin Jo Cabanis was Madge's uncle, but he insisted that she, in common with all others who knew him, should call him Cousin Jo. He was not old enough to be anybody's uncle, he protested, though he was nearer seventy than sixty; he proclaimed himself everybody's Cousin Jo, and everybody fell readily into accepting him at his own valuation. Even his own children and grandchildren spoke to and of him as Cousin Jo.

He advanced to meet Paul Rodman and Madge Cabanis, his gray head bare, his florid face beaming, his buoyant voice ringing out to them while they were yet a furlong away:

"Hello, Cousin Paul! Well, well! I thought it was high time you were turnin' up at the old stampin'-ground."

When they met he greeted Paul in the same

strain and with a hand-grip which was not soon forgotten.

As the three went on to the house Cousin Jo's words rollicked ahead continuously: "I hear you ain't a preacher to this good day, Cousin Paul! Well, well, young man, do you know how nigh you come to bankruptin' Cousin Jo Cabanis? Why, off and on when you were a shaver, I reckon I offered to bet half the folks in the county anything from a farm to a fiddle-string you would be a preacher, you had such a quiet way and such a long face. And all that saved me was that the noggin-heads would n't bet."

On the porch he suddenly bent toward the lapel of Paul's coat, which he drew first to his eyes and then to his nose.

"Look here, young man," he exclaimed, throwing his head back and directing his spectacles upon Paul's amused face, "is that what you do with mint in Kentucky?"

"Merely a fancy, Cousin Jo, for this afternoon only."

"Fancy, hey? Well, there 's plenty of pionies and such truck 'round in the front yard for that sort of fancy. But mint! — Madge, run and fetch me the other things."

The other things were brought, compounded, and disposed of. "And now if you don't say that beats mint in your buttonhole," Cousin Jo observed as he drew his bandana across his lips, "I'll — I ganny! I'll agree never to touch another drop of it as long as I live!"

Supper soon followed, and Aunt Viny ran in herself two or three times to see that it was properly served and to make sure that Paul did full justice to each product of her art which she remembered he had been partial to as a boy.

Afterward they sat on the veranda, Mrs. Cabanis in the big rocking-chair, Cousin Jo as loquacious as he could be while he kept his long cob pipe going, and Madge perched on the steps or flitting among the flowers with her waterpot.

The saffron and rose had faded from the sky and the dusk had darkened to starlight when Paul left the old people and joined Madge among the geraniums.

"Walk with me to the gate," he said. "You haven't told me about Nick yet."

"No. Do you think you deserve it? Maybe I'll tell you next time I see you."

At the gate he held out his hand. "Good-

night, Miss — I used to call you Chucklehead, but I know you better now and have a better name for you."

"Miss Cabanis?" she asked archly.

"Avice."

"Why Avice? Is it a name, or what?"

There was a poise of her head as she looked up at Paul which was in itself sufficient answer, for him, of her first question. He replied, —

"'I have watched you long, Avice, —
Watched you so
I have found your secret out;
And I know
That the restless ribboned things,
Where your slope of shoulder springs,
Are but undeveloped wings
That will grow.'"

"Oh!" she exclaimed gayly, "then Avice is poetry!"

"Yes; Avice is poetry.

"'When you enter in a room,
It is stirred
With the wayward, flashing light
Of a bird;
And you speak, and bring with you
Leaf and sun-ray, bud and blue,
And the wind-breath and the dew,
At a word.'"

She clapped her hands.

"How pretty! Was Avice a bird?"

"Yes. Avice was a bird. Every gesture, every motion and posture, were the volant graces of the birds; her voice had all their ittle 'shakes' and 'stills,' and from the tips of her wayward toes to the crown of her coquettish head she was an incarnation of their tricks and turns —

"'Just their eager, quick
"*Airs de tête*,"
All their flush and fever-heat
When elate;
Every bird-like nod and beck,
And a bird's own curve of neck
When she gives a little peck
To her mate.'"

"What an exquisite creature Avice was!" she cried, with a childish wringing of her hands. "But" — abruptly changing her tone to one of simple dignity — "you are not to give me such a name."

"Not the new one nor the old, either?" he laughed gently.

Her eyes shone with a sweet gravity in the starlight.

"Just Miss Cabanis — to-night."

XIV

THE STORY OF A BLUE-EYED CROW

HE returned one afternoon the following week, and they went for a walk with Piff.

As they passed through the gate Piff, frolicking in advance, turned into the path that descended to the creek and Division Valley.

"Wise Piff!" Paul remarked. "He takes it as a matter of course that we are going to the Valley."

"Piff knows that there is no other walk to compare with it," Miss Cabanis replied: "he has been there before."

"Division Valley and this farm are the only things around here which seem just as they were when I went away. I feel like thanking Cousin Jo Cabanis for keeping the old place unchanged, though I suppose it would have been better for him if he had caught the fever for improvement."

"He says that what was good enough for Judge Sevier Rodman is good enough for

Cousin Jo Cabanis. Besides, I 've heard him tell Aunt Viny that even if he wanted to make any changes he did n't believe she 'd let him."

They chatted on till they came to the creek, spanned here by the trunk of an ash so slender that Paul resolved he would be very careful in leading Madge over.

"Oh, look!" she suddenly cried; and before he knew what she meant to do she had darted by him and was skimming lightly over the narrow log. By the time he had worked his own footing across, she had run to a little copse twenty yards away and was back by the side of the creek, holding up for his inspection a sprig of something most wonderfully blue.

"Is n't it lovely?" she exclaimed, her cheeks coloring and her eyes shining. "It 's the very first I 've seen this summer!"

"Ah! it 's — why, it 's closed gentian, is n't it?" he said as he came up to her. "It 's the first *I 've* seen since I left Tennessee."

When they reached the beech-tree under which Paul had awaited the squirrels and shot the crow, Madge sat down on the twisted root and he threw himself on the grass in front of her.

"You prefer a seat at the foot of the beech this afternoon," he twitted her, "instead of in the branches of the black-jack — or was it higher still, in the elm?"

She blushed so beautifully that he could hardly be sorry, though he felt he ought to be, that he had spoken.

"I thank you, Mr. Paul Rodman," she answered in the little half-mocking, half-serious way which he thought became her so well; "but I don't usually sit in the branches of trees, and never except when I choose my company especially for the occasion."

"Nick, for instance," he laughed.

"Always Nick — and only Nick."

"I know I was very much uninvited on the last occasion; but are n't you going to tell me about Nick?"

"How can I help it after — after the way you found me here the other afternoon? Oh! you could n't keep me from telling you about Nick now?"

Paul liked to laugh at her; but it was a laugh so full of boyish comradeship and so genuinely keyed with tribute to her own charm that she did not seem to mind it. He laughed now, and, his elbow on the grass and

his hand supporting his head, he looked up to her and said : —

"Once upon a time — "

"Once upon a time," she took it up, her hands clasped around her knees, and her eyes now falling on Paul and now far overlooking him, "ever so long ago — six, seven, maybe eight years — when I was a little girl, I found a crow's nest in the elm-tree there, and I wanted, more than anything else in the world, to see inside it. I could n't climb the elm-tree, but you can get into that from the black-jack, and the grape-vine made it easy to get into the black-jack. That 's how I saw inside the nest."

She was gazing beyond him now, and the light, sifting down on her through the beech leaves, made as delicate a play as Paul could wish to look upon.

"They were the ugliest, queerest little creatures," she said, smiling, as her eyes met his again, "and the hungriest. I came every day and brought all sorts of nice things to feed them with. The old crows made a great fuss about it at first, and never were really reconciled to it, but I would always leave part of the lunch where they would find it, and they

got so that sometimes they would not fly farther away than the poplar over there when I went up to visit the family. The young birds were always glad to see me until they grew big enough to leave the nest; then they became wild and followed their parents, — all but Nick. Nick was not so suspicious as the others; he was the last to fly, and his eyes were the last to turn from blue to brown."

"Blue? A crow with blue eyes?"

She surveyed him with amused astonishment.

"Of course! Did n't you know that young crows, until they get worldly-wise and old enough to take care of themselves, have blue eyes?"

"Not until this minute. But I believe whatever you say about crows."

"When Nick left the nest he would not avoid me entirely, like the others, but would return and eat what I brought him, whenever he saw me in the tree — You, Piff!"

She ran swiftly after Piff, who had found a young catbird, uncertain of its wings, and was chasing it from bush to bush. She came back with the dog following meekly.

"Make him lie down by you, and keep him out of mischief," she ordered Paul.

"Come here, Pifferaro, and be quiet, and you may hear about Nick."

"There is n't much more to tell," Madge continued. "Nick and I used to meet in the elm once or twice a week every summer until two years ago, when I went away. This summer I was trying to coax him back, and had got him to come as near as the poplar, when you shot him."

"Poor Nick! He was not as wise as the other members of the family, after all, it seems."

"I was dressed as I was when you saw me here the other afternoon," she added a little self-consciously, "because I wanted Nick to recognize me. That was the way I used to dress when he was not afraid of me."

"I see now — when you were a 'little girl'?"

"Yes. I did not expect any one to see me. I had never met any one in the Valley before but Nick."

She rose, and Paul again noticed the initials beside his own on the beech-tree.

"*M. C.!*" he said, with sudden animation, pointing to the letters. "They are yours! Did you cut them there?"

"Of course," she laughed; "a long time

ago, — the first year after I came to live with Cousin Jo."

"Why?"

"Because you had left such a good place for them."

"I cut mine there," he laughed, "to commemorate a beautiful dream I had here once."

"What was it? Oh, tell me!" she cried eagerly.

"It is n't worth telling now. I have grown worldly-wise, like your crows, and know how to value dreams."

On the way back, when they saw the bluff where the wild roses grew they looked at each other and broke into simultaneous laughter that caused Piff to bark up at them with energetic interest.

"Why did you do it?" he asked.

"You know very well!"

"Indeed, I don't know at all!"

"Really?"

"Really!"

"How stupid! when I have just told you I was dressed only for Nick and the Valley."

He left her at the gate, but not before Cousin Jo Cabanis had walked down from the house and urged him to remain to supper.

That invitation declined, Cousin Jo promptly extended another. "Come over and go fishin' with me to-morrow. If you 're half as fond of it as your father was, I 'll warrantee you some good spote. There 's a fine chance of trout in the river this year, — more than there has been since the spring of '59. Go along with me, and if you don't ketch as many as you want to tote home I 'll agree to live on Job's turkey the rest of my time."

XV

MANAGER JOYCE DISTURBS A SUMMER HOLIDAY

DAYS came and went, and many of them found Paul Rodman at Cousin Jo Cabanis's. The old place was so home-like; Mrs. Cabanis was so restful; Cousin Jo was so jolly; Aunt Viny was so palatably resourceful; Piff was so genuinely hospitable; while Madge, whether she appeared to him as child or woman, was so divertingly companionable that he was well satisfied to spend his vacation thus.

In truth, it was more a vacation than he had ever known since he had left the country for the town. It was rest, — not only from work and friction and social shams, but rest from thought and self. There was for him no more reason why he should think or worry than there was for Piff in the sun, for the butterflies among the honeysuckles, or for Madge among the rose-bushes, and he yielded to the tranquil-

lizing influences of the hour with a passivity that was in itself, for the time, an elimination from his mind of everything foreign to those influences. And those influences meant vacuity, serenity, content.

Perhaps he saw more of Cousin Jo Cabanis than he saw of the others — with the exception of Piff. He was amused by Cousin Jo's yarns, which, owing chiefly to the fact that his wife and niece had heard them often before, were usually reserved for opportunities when the ladies were not present. Moreover, there was a strong bond of fellowship between the two men in their fondness for fishing; and probably what most confirmed Cousin Jo's liking for Paul was the cheerful patience with which he stuck by the old angler during the long hours when the fish would not bite, and his willingness when hooks and lines became entangled among roots or rocks, or when other trying incidents of a fisherman's luck were encountered, to let Cousin Jo do all the fuming and swearing.

"The fun of fishin'," explained Cousin Jo on a day that he and Paul left the river without having had even a nibble, "ain't always in what you ketch; it's a good deal

in what you 're expectin' to ketch. You 'd soon get tired of it if you pulled out fish as fast as you could throw your line in the water. The good of it is that you never know what 's goin' to happen and when it 's goin' to happen, or if it ain't goin' to happen at all. Even after you 've hooked your fish you don't know for certain whether you 're goin' to land him, or just how big he is, or frequently what he is. If you could see everything that was takin' place under the water, fishin' would n't be half the spote it is. All you ought to see is a flash of your trout now and then as he flirts up out of the water. It 's somethin' like seein' just a flash of a likely ankle."

That was a hard season on the bass in the river near by. Few were the mornings which Cousin Jo and Paul did not devote to their reels. Sometimes Barney Carruthers joined them, and less frequently Madge Cabanis, when her earnest but erratic efforts to manage a rod and line always provoked from Cousin Jo lectures on the piscatorial art and the inadequacy of the female mind to comprehend its rudimentary principles.

"There are three things in the world a good deal alike," he would say, after he had

straightened out Madge's tackle and returned to his own poles, — "fish and women and razors. You never know what they are goin' to do or what they ain't goin' to do. And a fish would be as handy with a razor as a woman is with a fish. There are some things a woman just can't natchully do; and one of them is fishin' and another is throwin' a rock. If she could do the last any better than she can the first, I'd advise you, Madge, to give up hooks and lines and try throwin' rocks at the fish. Maybe you might some time or other fetch one that way. There you go, now, slashin' your pole like you were fightin' off yellow-jackets, and larrupin' your line as if you had to lasso a fish like a buffalo. Stop! What are you tryin' to do? If you can't learn to cast a line any better than that, it would save wear and tear and danger to surroundin' life and limb if you'd put your hook and line into your apron and just spill them into the water. Whenever you ketch a fish by any such didos as yours, I'll agree to dip the river dry so you can pick up the others with a pair of tongs."

Nevertheless Madge did succeed eventually in catching a fish, which she landed in the

branches of a sycamore, dropping her rod in a panic, and scudding precipitately from beneath the tree. This was bad enough in the eyes of Cousin Jo, but when she insisted that the fish should be put back into the river, and when Paul Rodman actually complied with her appeals on that point, the old gentleman gave it up and lectured her no more.

Paul drifted on in this way more than a month before anything happened to disturb the smooth current of his course.

He had gone over to the Cabanis's rather early one morning and found Madge on the veranda with a letter in her lap.

"Oh," she cried, as he sat down beside her, "I must tell you my good news. Mr. Joyce offers me an increase of salary for next season."

"Salary!" in astonishment. "What Joyce?"

"Why, Mr. Archibald Joyce!"

"Not — you don't mean Joyce, the theatrical manager?"

"Of course!" she laughed. "Did you think I could mean any one else?"

"But — I don't understand. Why is he presuming to offer you a salary? Surely the fellow is not trying to get you to go on the stage?"

There was a look on Paul's face suggestive of the one which had settled on it when he threw Judd Oxnard from the car.

It was between amusement and surprise that Madge answered, —

"He 's trying to get me to stay on the stage. Really, you don't dare tell me, Mr. Paul Rodman, that you did n't know I was already a celebrated actress?"

"You — Madge — an actress! Good — oh! come, now; you are making game of me again!"

"You did n't know it?" she laughed in feigned despair. "And I have been on the stage two whole seasons! Why, once a paper in Philadelphia gave me three full lines; and last spring, in Buffalo, when Florence Falk was ill a week, Mr. Joyce let me play *Babette*, and some of the papers gave me, oh, that much!" measuring on her finger.

Paul sat gazing blankly out over the lawn. It had been years since he had received such a shock — since he thought he could receive such a shock.

Finally he turned to her and forced himself to ask, —

"Do you like it?"

"The stage?"

"Yes."

She was very serious now as she looked at him.

"I hate it."

Paul did not know how his drawn face relaxed. "Then why did you undertake it?"

"Because," she replied, with a grave candor that was new to him, "I wanted to do something — to be independent. A friend of my father's got Mr. Joyce to give me a chance, and I was very glad to try it."

"And — with what success?" he asked, in a slightly constrained manner.

"Not dazzling," she smiled. "I had only very small parts except the week when I took Miss Falk's place. I seemed to please Mr. Joyce as *Babette*; but that was because *Babette* suits me so well. It is not likely I shall ever amount to anything as an actress, unless in something like *Babette*."

Paul, too, was smiling now. "I don't think you would have to act much to make a perfect *Babette*. You would only have to be yourself. But how do you expect to do much on the stage if, as you say, you hate it?"

"I don't expect to do much; but I suppose I can do as well as I could at anything else. It is not really that I hate the work itself, — only the disagreeable things that go with it."

"Yes, I can believe it!" Paul said as he rose. The thought of such a girl being subjected to those things stirred in him a deep and sullen spirit of revolt. "Am I to ask you whether you intend to accept Joyce's offer?"

"I cannot decide for a month or two yet. I shall remain with Aunt Mildred for the present, unless one of her married daughters comes to live with her. Her health has not been very good lately."

Paul found Cousin Jo Cabanis sitting in his shirt-sleeves, under the trees, strapping a razor and issuing loud orders to various little negroes to bring him hot water, paper, and towels.

"Hello, Cousin Paul!" he said heartily. "You see I 'm a little behind with my shavin' this mornin' — You, Ulysses! fetch another chair out here right away! — It only goes to prove what I 've told you about razors. They are all of the feminine gender. Now, that one with the tortoise handle there was as sweet as a song yesterday mornin', and to-day she pulls

and scratches like a wild-cat. This one I 'm at work on is a love when she don't sulk, but when she does you may grind her and hone her and strap her by the hour and she only gets sulkier. Then if you throw her away in disgust and pick her up a day or two later, maybe she will have changed her mind altogether and behave so beautifully that you 'll wish there was nothin' else to do but shave. Maybe she will and maybe she won't. You never know till you try her. I reckon a man that shaves right spends enough time coaxin' and humorin' his razors to run most any ordinary business. I s'pose I 'd 'a' made many a better crop if I 'd put the time on it that I 've put on these razors. But a man who shaves has got to get along with razors somehow, and, what 's more, he 's got to do it every day. I may have let the weeds grow in my fields, Cousin Paul, and I may have done many other things that a good farmer ought n't 'a' done, but I can say that nevertheless and notwithstandin' the contrariness of razors, there have been mighty few days since I married that I did n't manage to begin and finish shavin' somewhere between sun-up and sun-down. When it comes to lettin' the grass grow under

your feet or lettin' the beard grow on your face, Cousin Jo Cabanis will put up with the grass every time."

He ran on in this strain until Paul, getting up to go, found an opportunity to say, —

"I have been talking to Miss Madge this morning about the stage. Do you encourage that notion of hers?"

"Encourage?" Cousin Jo's emission of the word was so cheerfully explosive that it caused Piff to awaken from a doze with a sharp bark. "Young man, you ought to know me better! I put my foot down on the whole project at the start; but what good did it do? Madge was of age and I could n't stop her. Would you know how to stop her if she had made up her mind to do a thing, Cousin Paul? She took it into her head that she must support herself; pay her board and all that — the idea of your own kinfolks payin' you board! — and there was no doin' anything with her. She was as contrary as any razor in the lot. See here, you ain't goin' already. You ain't more 'n got here. Sit down and wait till I get through this job, and we 'll slip down to the river and try Sanborn's Bend."

"Thank you, Cousin Jo; but I 'm not in the

humor for fishing to-day. I 'll come over again soon and we 'll give the Bend a trial."

He walked back slowly through the lane into the Carruthers fields, his eyes thoughtfully at his feet. Something — his lazy holiday, the summer itself — seemed to have ended suddenly. He had been abruptly jolted back into his world. He had not been dreaming again during these idle weeks, as in his boyhood, but here, in these haunts of his boyhood, he had been resting in the sunlight, away from the shadow of his shattered dreams. He had belonged to this peaceful summer, as Piff and Cousin Jo and Madge Cabanis belonged to it. And now the best of it was gone in an hour. No; not that; Madge Cabanis was not gone. Was it not worse than that; for had he not merely discovered that she had not existed? Had she not been another figment of his fancy, of his ignorance? He had believed her a simple child of the woods, untouched by the outer world; a boy in comradeship and innocent freedom; a maid in delicacy, caprice, and elusiveness. Now he knew her to have spent two years on the stage, that most trying school of sophistication, which seeks out the dross in

every woman's heart, and even if that heart be all gold, yet dims its lustre with calumny. He threw out his hands with a deep exclamation of revulsion from the thought of this young girl being subjected to such an ordeal; and for several days afterward the wave of revulsion returned at intervals as the thought recurred.

For, after all, — after all his prejudices against the influences of the stage as a vocation, after all his reawakened distrust of his attitude toward woman, — the thought of Madge Cabanis as an actress was only an occasional recurrence; his ordinary and involuntary thought of her being of the girl he and Nick had known in Division Valley, who provoked the mirth and the reprobation of Cousin Jo the fisherman, who teased Aunt Viny to proud "'straction," mothered Mrs. Cabanis, romped with Piff, and nursed her flowers in the twilight.

But with the recurrent thought of the actress there sometimes came the stinging self-reproach of a fleeting consciousness that he caught himself studying her, now and then, with the object of noting whether there were in the country girl any trace of the actress.

XVI

THE WHIPPOORWILL

THESE self-reproachful moments, which did more than anything else, except his first knowledge of Madge's connection with the stage, to disturb the tranquillity of his summer, grew rarer as the weeks passed; for it was impossible to be with this girl day after day at her own home and escape the conviction that she was as genuine as the life of the woods and fields of which she was a part.

Thus it was that at the close of an August day Madge Cabanis, the actress, whom he had never known, had faded for the time into the vagueness of a past illusion, and only Madge Cabanis, the girl he knew, was a vital presence. They were sitting on the veranda, he on a step below her, and she leaning against one of the pillars. Their talk had been fitful, neither seeming to think it worth while to break the intervening silences. As he had come to know her better he had found that, among all her vari-

able moods, she was never more interesting to him, and never quite so paradoxical, as she was when, nestled in some quiet corner, as now, her head no longer nodded emphasis to her chatter and an unwonted calm rested on her face. At such times Paul, looking into the soft shadows that darkened her eyes, felt that these sunny months of his holiday had not revealed to him all that Madge Cabanis was, or would be.

But he would quickly brush aside such reflections and speculations. He preferred to regard Madge simply as a harmonious part of this pastoral summer. He liked her as she appeared to him; he did not wish to think of her as she might be or would be. In fact, he did not wish to think of her at all. That was one reason why it was so pleasant to be with Madge. Even a man who professed to have a "philosophy," and who set himself to live according to its canons, need not trouble himself to drop a single plummet of thought and square himself with its line in his association with her. One could enjoy the presence of Madge Cabanis with the exertion of no more subjective energy than was required to enjoy the blowing of the breeze or the shining of the

sun. With these, she had helped to make idyllic these summer days which had been to him so much like a brief renewal of his boyhood. These days would not last long, and while he could he would blot out all his past that had not been spent on this old farm and all his future that was to be spent elsewhere.

But — fatal fatuity of a mind which arrogates to itself a philosophy — it did not occur to Paul that in this very approach to a renewal of his early youth lay the chief danger to that precious philosophy which he had constructed for himself on the wreck of his youthful air-castles. And if that philosophy was what he needed for his self-protection, never did he need it more than at this hour when the tide that bore him back to his boyhood was strongest. Madge was so exquisitely lovely in this rare, gentle mood; there was something about her which compelled and confined his consentience to her; the very silence between them seemed eloquent of her, not merely as she had been, but as she might be and as she would be. Surely it is not through the eyes of his boyhood that he should look upon her, unless

he would surrender the "wisdom" of his manhood.

And at this moment all his environments tended but to strengthen this tide. They impressed him with a vague conviction, as he turned from Madge to the scene before him, that this was only one of the many evenings, exactly like all the others except for her presence, when he had lounged on these steps and watched the day die out. The sun had just sunk from sight, leaving, as of old, the western sky aglow and the eastern hills dim, purpling billows. Nearer and southward, as of old, the mists from the winding creek lifted slowly and hung above Division Valley. Now, as then, the forest trees on the lawn loomed in tranced stillness, the shadows of the twilight drawn into the deepening green of their foliage, while in the sky beyond them remained a paler green, luminously pure, merging above to yet paler blue, against which swallows skimmed swiftly and a night-hawk swept his errant course and rang his resonant refrain. The all-pervading silence was intensified by the rasp and drone of the summer insects from leaf and grass. Up the lane tinkled faintly the chains of the plough-horses

returning home; while beyond the barn, as she called the cows, rose and sank the musical voice of a negro as softly and rhythmically as a distance-subdued yodel. The insidious odors which the flowers exhaled seemed mingled with evanescent aromas from far, ploughed fields; the moon rested like a crescent crown above the great maple-tree, and the fire-flies, one by one, drifted up from the sward and donned her golden colors in the dusk.

The tide was full; Paul Rodman was a boy again, sitting on the old veranda in the evening and dreaming his dreams of love and woman. And here at his side were both love and woman — and a woman sweet and spotless as any born of dreams. Almost without realizing what he was doing, except that he was obeying the dictates of all that was in him worthy of obedience, he reached out and took her hand.

He felt it tremble in his clasp, and saw the long lashes quiver sensitively over the startled questioning of her eyes.

"Madge," he said with infinite tenderness, "Madge —"

Just then across the fields floated to him the clear, reed notes of a whippoorwill.

"I —" Paul continued, his voice abruptly hardening and his eyes fixed on the dim thicket whence those notes were sounding — "I am — going away to-morrow, and must say good-bye."

Both rose as he spoke.

"Good-bye," low and precarious, was all that she trusted herself to answer; and after a few awkward commonplaces which he forced himself to utter, he went to find Mrs. Cabanis and Cousin Jo, leaving Madge standing on the porch, as white and unreal as if she were a wraith of the mists that hung above Division Valley.

For the call of the whippoorwill that had broken in on Paul had come to him, not from the thicket across the fields, but from a brazen clock that had stood one night in a Louisville shop-window.

XVII

COLLAPSE OF A PHILOSOPHY

HE returned to Louisville next day, feeling that he was a coward, and that it was impossible that he should not be a coward. It was himself, not Madge Cabanis, that he doubted: he would have staked his life on her — if he had not long before staked and lost all that could be in a man's life worth offering to a woman. He had nothing left but cowardice.

When he reached the city to which he had journeyed with so much hope years before, it was with a sentiment akin to loathing that he stepped into its streets. If the spirit of selfishness which is always so apparent to the superficial observer of urban conditions had been a source of disillusion on his first arrival in Louisville, it was now a source of self-disgust; for he was now a part of the life of this city, and, what was worse, he was fit for no other life. And yet he was not even fit for that, he told himself. He could not shut his

eyes and accept it as he found it; while, keeping them open, he could not escape seeing, in his own untrustworthy perspectives, abnormal proportions of that side of it which repelled him.

He decided, after remaining in Louisville a week, that for a time at least he would abandon all effort to resume his customary business and social relations. If he had not gone mooning off to his old home in Tennessee, it would have been practicable enough, he thought, to continue, as he had done for years, holding himself free from all temptations to forget his past or to deviate from the path which he had marked out for his future. But now he chafed with restlessness and a new discontent. He left town and went to his prospective fluor-spar mines. He was not needed there; yet he remained a fortnight, in sheer determination to occupy himself.

Suddenly he started North, stopping for a day or two in Chicago, which had usually been a divertisement to him. But now the jostling streets jarred on him; the beautiful parks and boulevards were meretricious mockeries; while the great lake, which in his eyes was the one honest and pure thing about the city, seemed

to fret in ceaseless unrest, as if against some mighty leash that restrained it from leaping forward and blotting out the magnificent desecration which impious greed had erected on its shores.

Late one night, as he was on the point of going on to Canada, he was caught by a letter from Barney Carruthers in Louisville, which closed with this paragraph: —

"Father sends me some bad news about our friends across the pike. He writes, 'I have just heard that Miss Cabanis is so ill there is no chance for her to live another twenty-four hours.' Awful, ain't it? She was such a jolly little thing, and so full of life."

Never before had Paul known what crushing anguish a human being could sustain. Once he had passed through a terrible crisis, which had affected him more profoundly than it would have affected most men; but in that case he had suffered through no fault of his own, from a wrong inflicted on him; not for another, from a wrong inflicted by himself.

Not until now had he fully realized the depth of his love for Madge Cabanis; and in the light of such realization all the barriers

which he had erected against that love appeared absurdly trivial and inexpressibly mean. If Madge was dead, then not only had he spurned, by his pusillanimous conduct, the best thing which a man's heart could crave and which the world could give him, but he feared that he was guilty of her murder.

Was she dead? Barney Carruthers' letter was five days old, having been forwarded from the mines. Stephen Carruthers' letter must be at least a day older than Barney's, and Stephen Carruthers had written that she could not live twenty-four hours. Paul took out his watch and stared at it blankly; he could not start South for hours yet. He moved across the lobby of the hotel toward the telegraph office, but stopped before he reached it. A message could not be delivered in the country and be answered before he left Chicago, even if the telegraph office at Mavistoc were not, as he knew, closed until morning. All he could do was to telegraph Barney Carruthers.

Then he went to his room like a bewildered animal to its hole, and tried to think, — to reason the possibility of Madge's recovery into a probability. But it was futile. His

agony and remorse benumbed his brain to all else.

He descended to the lobby again, pacing the tiles until Barney Carruthers' answer came. He sat down, crushing the envelope in his hand before he brought himself to open it. But Barney had no later news than he had written. He had heard nothing from Tennessee since the arrival of his father's letter.

A sleepless night; a long ride to Louisville next day; another interminable night, and Paul Rodman was at last in Nashville. He reached Mavistoc in the afternoon, going directly from the train to a livery stable, where he ordered a horse.

He did not inquire of any one concerning Madge Cabanis. He dreaded definite information, now that he was where he might perhaps obtain it. Besides, he shrank from even mentioning the name of Madge now to a stranger or to a casual acquaintance.

While he waited for his horse to be saddled, a trim drummer drove up and as he alighted asked the proprietor of the stable the state of business.

"Mighty slow," was the jocular response. "Ain't much goin' on here lately 'cep' fun'als.

If 't wan't for fun'als and drummers I might as well shut up shop for a while, I reckon."

"Flush times in the mortuary industry, eh?" inquired the drummer.

"Heh?"

"Folks kickin' the bucket around here, are they?"

"Everybody dyin', 'pears like, — specially if they ain't able to pay their fun'al hack bills. Been mo' sickness in this part of the country the las' mont' than there has been the las' twenty year befo'."

Paul mounted his horse and turned out the familiar pike once more, every step of the animal being cumulative torture to him as it bore him to the certainty he longed yet feared to know.

As he passed the house where Madge Cabanis had lived as a little girl, with the sagging gate on which she had swung to say good-bye to him when he had first left Tennessee, Paul drew his hat over his eyes and shook his horse into a brisker canter.

Halfway along the lane he pulled up the horse sharply at sight of Aunt Viny and Piff a hundred yards ahead of him.

The certainty now was nearer than he had

expected, and for an instant he was impelled to jerk his horse out of sight behind a clump of bushes.

But he was not so weak as that. Instead, his face grim and his heart pounding, he urged the horse rapidly onward.

Piff soon discovered him and rushed up with joyous contortions and yelpings to greet him.

Aunt Viny stood in the road, with jaw dropped and eyes whitening, as she waited his coming.

"My lamb of life!" she cried as he rode up. "Is dish-yere you, Mr. Paul, er is you des stepped down offn a tombstone?"

"Howdy, Aunt Viny?" he said quickly, as he stopped. "How are you all?"

"We's all des toler'ble, Mr. Paul, 'cep'n' Miss Mildred. She been mighty nigh dead, but she peartnin' up ev'y day now, en dis mawnin she set up a li'l' spell."

He pressed the horse between his knees in such a vice that it sprang forward, only to be pulled back on its haunches as suddenly.

"Miss Mildred?" he asked, his breath stopping and his voice constricted. "Has Mrs. Cabanis been ill?"

"Lawd, yes, Mr. Paul; ain't you done heerd dat befo'?"

"And nobody else — Mr. Cabanis and Miss Madge — they have been well?"

"Dey sutny has, bless Gawd! Ef dey hadn' 'a' been we nuvver could 'a' kep' Miss Mildred's bref in her body."

Paul was leaning low over his horse now, gently stroking Piff, who stood on his hind feet to reach him. The warm blood was surging into his face once more, and there was a moisture in his eyes which only Piff might have seen.

"Well, I must get on, Aunt Viny!" he exclaimed as he galloped off with an abruptness that caused her to call out a warning to "be keerful wid dat fool hawss."

When he dismounted before the house, it was dusk. The mists hung over Division Valley, the moon rested over the maple-tree, and a whippoorwill was whistling across the fields.

He passed rapidly through the gate and up the walk. In the gathering twilight he could see a filmy figure in white standing at the top of the veranda steps. Another moment, and his straining eyes flashed with a sudden joy. He held out his arms to her as,

with his gaze fixed on her pale face, he strode up the steps.

"Madge!" he exclaimed, and she was clasped to his breast, while his swift kisses fell on her hair.

XVIII

A SLUMP IN FLUOR-SPAR

THEY were married within a month.

In Louisville they lived, that fall and the following winter, at a hotel. Just before the wedding Paul had bought a house, the one house in the city he longed for, but he could not get possession until the first of the year. He had not mentioned it to Madge, and thinking to surprise her, he asked her, early in January, if she would not go house-hunting with him.

"Why?" she inquired, without much interest. "You are not tired of the hotel already? It is so convenient and comfortable, and we see so many nice people here."

This, for the moment, rather upset him. Madge, in the flush of excitement in which she had been since she left Tennessee, had not questioned him pointedly concerning his plans, and he had avoided reference to them, in order not to invite any such questioning before he was ready with his surprise. But

the thought had never entered his mind that Madge expected or cared to live permanently in a hotel. He had looked forward to his married life as the beginning of his home life, and he had become so accustomed to the idea of quitting hotels as one of the happy results of marriage that it had not occurred to him his wife might have different views on that point. So it was with an effort to repress any evidence of disappointment due to Madge's reception of his proposition that he replied to her, —

"But would n't you like a convenient and comfortable house better ?"

"Oh, you must n't think of going to all that trouble for me," prinking before the mirror. "How do you like my hair done up in this style, Paul?"

"Your hair is always beautiful. But — I know of a house that might please you. Suppose we go and look at it to-morrow?"

"Oh, don't bother about houses, dear! I 'm bother enough to you already!" airily touching her cheek to his for a second, then turning away and beginning to draw on her gloves. "Hurry now, Paul, or we shall be late for the opera."

Paul said no more. It was the end, for a time, of his domestic plans. He knew that if he told Madge of the house he had bought, she would readily adapt her own preferences to his, but her chance words had disclosed to him that her preference was the hotel at present, and against that disclosure his own inclinations weighed nothing with him. So he leased the house next day to Jack Fordham.

It was a busy fall and winter for Paul. His new company had been organized and the fluor-spar mines were under way, but the preliminary work had all devolved on him. There was, of course, a board of directors, but, like most directors, they were little more than dummies. Paul was not only the president of the company, but he was the manager and treasurer. His assistant in the Louisville office was Drewdie Poteet, whom Paul had made secretary. Drewdie's career as an encourager of the breeding interest through the instrumentality of a racing stable, at the head of which was the redoubtable *Double-quick*, had completely collapsed, swallowing up in the wreck all of Drewdie's fortune except that which he had invested in Fluor-spar stock, and he was now hard at work under

Paul trying to master the mysteries of book-keeping.

With Paul's persistent promotion and energetic management the Ohio River Fluor-spar Company had, in the public estimation, now passed beyond the stage of a doubtful experiment to that of "a good thing." It was already on a paying basis. The stock, which had been issued at par, was a favorite in the local market, and had gone up as high as 130. In one week, however, early in April it had sagged steadily until it reached 117. This worried Paul no little, as there was no apparent cause for the decline, and other active local stocks were either holding their own, or advancing. He was worried all the more when, after diligent investigation, he concluded that the decline was due to what seemed to be systematic efforts to misrepresent the credit and condition of his company.

But at the end of a particularly busy day, as he sat alone in his office, he felt that he had solved the mystery of the slump in Fluor-spar stock. He had traced two of the slanderous rumors against the company to Judd Oxnard, and he knew that Oxnard's brokers that day had orders to buy the stock at 115.

Furthermore, nearly a year before, Paul had borrowed $12,000 for his company, securing it with a mortgage to a local title company, and the title company, as was its practice, had peddled out bonds against this, and Oxnard had bought the whole lot. Paul had expected to renew this note, but recently he had learned through the title company that its "client" would insist on payment in full at maturity, or proceed to collect by foreclosure. Already one of the rumors which had depressed the stock was that the Fluor-spar Company would default on its note and be sold out under the hammer. Paul now understood this rumor. In order to buy Fluor-spar stock for less than its value — perhaps to get control of the company — Judd Oxnard was simply employing the methods that are resorted to almost any fine day by highly respectable "bears" on Wall Street.

Now that he knew what he had to meet, Paul worried no longer for the Fluor-spar stockholders, most of whom held small amounts and were therefore especially uneasy. "Go home," he said to them, that afternoon, when they came to him for advice, "and pay no attention to these quotations. They are made

by men who want to frighten you out of your stock. It is worth more than it ever was."

Only that day he had got the money together to pay Oxnard's note, but as it would not be due until six weeks later he had put the fund into United States unregistered bonds, which, in addition to the item of interest, promised a profit in advancing market value. These had been entered on Drewdie Poteet's books, but, though received after banking hours, had not been placed in the little safe in which Drewdie locked his books at night. That safe was open most of the day, and Paul had taken the bonds and deposited them in his personal box in a vault, having just returned from the mission as he sat in his office and pondered his plans for checkmating Oxnard's game against the Fluor-spar stockholders.

He remained at his office later than usual. In response to a telegram, he expected to take a night train for New York; there was some writing to do, and Drewdie Poteet's books were to be looked over. He wished to get all the work out of the way, that he might spend the hours before train time with Madge.

At last when he closed his desk and left the office it was eight o'clock. He walked swiftly,

not wishing to lose another minute more of his evening with Madge than was necessary. As he entered the hotel lobby several men were standing near the cigar counter, and among them he recognized Judd Oxnard's loud voice.

"I tell you," Oxnard was proclaiming as Paul approached, "Fluor-spar is on its way to 50, — it is on its way to the dump-pile."

One of the group, discovering Paul, spoke a word of warning in an undertone, but Oxnard, reddening a little, stared at Paul for a second and then, including all his hearers with a sweep of his arm, added in even a louder tone, —

"If anybody thinks I don't know what I 'm talkin' about, I will sell him a hundred shares of Fluor-spar at par, deliverable May 15."

The crowd was silent; every one, including Oxnard, was now looking at Paul, who was passing by, within a few feet.

At this he paused. "Gentlemen," he said, "if none of you wishes to accept that proposition, I 'll take it."

"Done!" exclaimed Oxnard. "And now," his heavy head bent forward toward Paul, "there 's another hundred, same time, at 90."

"Oh, here! I 'd like that, if you 've no objection, Rodman," Fletcher Keith put in.

"Certainly," Paul assented and walked on, turning to Oxnard with the remark, —

"Gaynor & Clay will be authorized to attend to this for me to-morrow."

"Done ag'in!" laughed Oxnard, viciously.

XIX

AVICE

MADGE was upstairs, dressing and wondering why Paul was so late.

She was very happy as Mrs. Paul Rodman. The social life of a city was something new to her, and she entered it with a zest that was characteristic. She was acknowledged to be a decided "success." Her artless enthusiasm, her innocent coquetry, her engaging freshness and delicate beauty, together with her exquisite dressing, united in investing her with a charm of novelty, and made an undeniable impression. Mrs. MacQuarrie, who, having married MacQuarrie, as she freely avowed, to secure the MacQuarrie tartan, and having secured it, together with a divorce, now had time to devote herself, unencumbered by conjugal cares, to society leadership, taxed her vocal powers, as hardy as they were, in expatiating on the attractions of "that dear child, young Mrs. Rodman," whom she took under her

patronage, notwithstanding the lack of encouragement with which Paul himself met her advances. Even the most austere leader of the intellectual set, Miss Shaw, — who since her contributions to *The Woman's Windlass* insisted on identifying herself as Hester Grotheringcote Shaw, — admitted that Paul Rodman's wife was "quite a type," and classified the type as "just the sort of woman the so-called stronger sex would be most likely to go daft about." As for that other society leader, Drewdie Poteet, Madge was one woman whom he was known to praise invariably without qualification.

Paul Rodman, busy as he was, "went out" a great deal more that winter than he had ever done before his marriage. He had determined to gratify as far as he could Madge's desire for social pleasures, hoping that the edge of her eagerness for a life of which she had seen so little would in time wear away. If she had been any other woman of his acquaintance, he might have allowed himself to grow doubtful over the outcome. But he felt that such activity and gayety were as natural and as harmless to Madge in the city as the flowers and Piff had been in the coun-

try. It would all turn out best in the end, he thought, and if he craved a somewhat different life, he must be content, for the present, to wait for it.

To-night he found Madge posing and preening before her full-length mirror, eying critically and approvingly, from every point of view which she could gain by a twist of the head or a turn of the body, the toilet which she had just completed. Paul paused in the doorway between her room and the small parlor, and smilingly watched the pantomime. She discovered his reflection in the glass and made a little courtesy to it.

"Ah, Mr. Paul Rodman!" she said. "So you have come at last! And you have the audacity to stand there laughing instead of begging forgiveness for being so late!"

Paul went toward her with extended hands, and she ran to meet him. She caught his hands in hers, but as he drew her to him and was about to throw his arm around her, she quickly slipped aside.

"No, no, no!" she laughed. "Not in this dress!" She receded a step, and giving the skirt a little smoothing caress added, "How do you like it, Paul? Is n't it pretty?"

"Yes, it's pretty," he replied; "but I don't like it."

Her face fell, and it was a surprised and hurt look that she fixed on him.

"You — don't — like — my — dress! Oh, Paul! And I thought it was your color."

"I don't like any dress which makes you say 'No, no, no!'"

The blush and the pleased laugh should have recompensed him for any loss he had suffered. She threw him a kiss from the tips of her fingers, following it with—

"But you, Paul — you have not even begun to get ready! And I am to receive with Mrs. Garnett to-night, and promised to come early!"

"I was kept at the office longer than usual. But I was about to ask you, Madge, if you have your heart set on going to Mrs. Garnett's this evening?"

"Why, what a question! Has — has anything serious happened?" her eyes widening in apprehension.

"No, dear," he smiled; "only I can't very well take you to-night."

"Again?" her face clouding. "How unfortunate! Let me see," counting her fingers,

"this is the third time since Lent I've had to go out with some one else, Paul."

"I'm sorry; but I'm called to New York on business, and as my train leaves shortly after midnight and I have several little things to look after in the mean time, I could not very well dress twice and take in Mrs. Garnett's."

"Oh, I'm so sorry! What a hateful thing business is! And you would have had such a good time at Mrs. Garnett's, too. She entertains so delightfully. But, oh, Paul," the thought seeming just to have dawned on her, "of course you will manage to go somehow, for we shall want to see as much as possible of each other before your train leaves."

"I'm sure it would hardly be worth while to make the effort. I should barely have time to do more than get to Mrs. Garnett's and get away again."

He turned from her and picked up a book lying on the table, not wishing her to see the disappointment which he was afraid showed too plainly on his face.

But Madge was centred in her own disappointment. She dropped into a chair with a sigh.

"Then I shall not go either," she said. "Of course I shall not."

Paul glanced at her eagerly, but she was such a picture of childish depression that his eyes instantly fell to the book.

"I can take you, dear," he suggested, "and you can return with some one else in the hotel, — Mrs. Hurd, for instance."

"Oh, but I shall not go, Paul — how could you think it? — if you are to leave to-night," hopelessly.

"Madge," he said, as he turned the leaves of the little volume, "have you looked over the *Vignettes in Rhyme* I brought you yesterday?"

"Not yet," she replied absently; "I have been so busy ever since."

"Do you remember some verses I quoted to you that day when I made my first call at Cousin Jo Cabanis's?"

"Yes, about the bird girl," in the same preoccupied manner.

"Here is the whole poem in this book."

"Is it? I will read it to-morrow."

"It closes thus," lightly, —

"'When you left me, only now,
In that furred,
Puffed, and feathered Polish dress,
I was spurred

Just to catch you, O my Sweet,
By the bodice, trim and neat, —
Just to feel your heart a-beat,
Like a bird.

"'Yet, alas! Love's light you deign
But to wear
As the dew upon your plumes,
And you care
Not a whit for rest or hush;
But the leaves, the lyric gush,
And the wing-power, and the rush
Of the air.

"'So I dare not woo you, Sweet,
For a day,
Lest I lose you in a flash,
As I may;
Did I tell you tender things,
You would shake your sudden wings;
You would start from him who sings,
And away.'"

"Oh, I know what we can do, Paul!" she cried gayly, springing to her feet. "I will remain with you until you get ready to go to the train; then you can take me to Mrs. Garnett's on your way to the station, and I can return with Mrs. Hurd. Why did n't we think of it before?" catching one hand in the other in a way she had when she was excited.

"Yes, why did n't we?" Paul smiled. "It 's very simple, is n't it?"

"And it will be the next thing to having you go to the ball and enjoy it with me."

Paul did not answer. There would have been nothing for him to say even if there had not been a quick rapping at the parlor door, instantly followed by the entrance of Mrs. MacQuarrie in a whirlwind of crinkling skirts, after whom, like drift in the track of the gale, came Drewdie Poteet.

Madge ran out to meet them, and Paul was not far behind her.

"Ah, here you are!" Mrs. MacQuarrie, rubicund and plump, exclaimed, kissing Madge. "How are you, Mr. Rodman? We are just in time, Mr. Poteet! You see," turning to Madge again and running on in a round, bounding voice that might have been developed in high winds, "Mr. Poteet said he wanted to see your husband before he left for New York to-night, and I said, 'I wonder if that poor child has any one to take her to Ellen Garnett's, if her husband is going to New York? We might be in time to get her to go with us.' And Mr. Poteet said Mr. Rodman would probably go to Ellen Garnett's himself, if only for a little while, though he did n't believe Paul Rodman was as fond of

society as he used to be, and all he did go out for was to feast his eyes on his pretty wife. And I —"

"Oh, come now, Mrs. MacQuarrie," Drewdie Poteet laughed; "you forget. That was n't what I said."

"Shut up, Drewdie Poteet! And I said, 'Pshaw! Paul Rodman likes society well enough, only he has seen more of it than she has, and he 'd be a wretch if he did n't want to feast his eyes on a wife like that, — everybody else does, I 'm sure.' And I 'm awfully glad you have n't gone yet —" to Madge. "And I don't see how you can make up your mind to leave her at all, Mr. Rodman."

"It is n't a matter of inclination, Mrs. MacQuarrie," smiled Paul. "But it ought to be some consolation to know that I leave her for to-night in such appreciative hands."

"Would n't anybody take better care of her — you make yourself easy on that point. And oh!" — to Madge again — "how beautiful you are looking! Who made it?"

There were a few moments in which Madge and Mrs. MacQuarrie were lost to all else except the dress, while Drewdie Poteet and Paul talked Fluor-spar.

Then there was a tap, from the corridor, on the partially open door, accompanied by a rich voice, —

"May I come in and see your gown, Mrs. Rodman?"

And Lucy Oxnard, handsomer than ever and thoroughly at ease, was in the room.

"Oh, you are ravishing!" she said to Madge.

"Do you really like it, Mrs. Oxnard?" Madge asked, with unaffected pleasure, advancing to meet her.

"Dear me, if it ain't Lucy Oxnard!" exclaimed Mrs. MacQuarrie. "How are you, Lucy? I did n't know you 'd got back from Florida."

"I 've only been here for two or three days. I 'm really just passing through, on my way to Europe."

"Europe in summer and Cathay in winter. It 's always only just passing through Louisville with you, ain't it, Lucy? Poor Judd Oxnard! He never gets off of Fifth Street, does he?"

Mrs. Oxnard laughed mildly.

"Here are some flowers I came by to leave with you, dear," she said to Madge; "but nothing could make you look lovelier. You

must run up to 527 to-morrow and say good-bye. Remember, I leave to-morrow afternoon." And Mrs. Oxnard, serene and graceful, disappeared into the corridor while Madge was yet effervescing over the roses.

When Lucy Oxnard had entered, Drewdie Poteet grew red and looked uncomfortably at Paul, but he saw nothing that he was certain of except that Paul's bow, which was slight and perfunctory, seemed more indicative of surprise than welcome. Whatever else he may have felt, Paul was certainly surprised by the visit of Lucy Oxnard and her assumption of interest in Madge. Beyond, perhaps, a casual meeting at some public gathering he was not aware that Madge knew her.

"My! Drewdie Poteet," Mrs. MacQuarrie marvelled, "you and Lucy Oxnard are as formal as if you did n't know each other like old shoes. Madge, is she stopping at this hotel?"

Madge answered that Mrs. Oxnard had been at the hotel two or three days, adding, —

"She was in to see me this afternoon, and helped me ever so kindly with my hair."

"Off to Europe to-morrow, is she? That's like her. I don't suppose she has spent

more than a month or two a year with Judd Oxnard since her honeymoon. But you can't blame her for that. Well, shall we start, dear?"

"It's so good of you, Mrs. MacQuarrie," Madge replied, a little agitated; "but I'm not going, you know — that is, not till Paul —"

"I suppose you might as well go on with Mrs. MacQuarrie and Drewdie now, Madge," Paul said, coming over to her and once more sinking what, under the circumstances, he regarded as his own selfishness in order to further her pleasure. "It is getting late and I could not see very much of you, anyway."

"Oh, no, Paul! I could n't possibly, — do you really think I ought to go?"

Paul could not help smiling at her. "I think it would be outright rudeness to Mrs. MacQuarrie and Drewdie if you refused to go, with no better excuse. I will get your wrap."

"So say we all!" exclaimed Mrs. MacQuarrie. "Well, come on, Mr. Poteet. We'll wait for you at the elevator, Madge." And she marched out, with Drewdie Poteet, thus giving Paul an opportunity for a last word with Madge, — an act of consideration which

he would hardly have expected of Mrs. MacQuarrie.

Paul returned and fastened the wrap around Madge.

"Oh, Paul!" she grieved meanwhile, "it's a shame you must go away to-night, is n't it? And you are sure you will be back soon?"

"Saturday, with luck. Good-bye, Madge."

He stooped and kissed her lightly.

She did not move, but stood as if waiting, while the rose hue of her hood's lining seemed reflected on her face.

"But may I?" Paul smiled. "That dress, you know."

"I don't care for the dress — now."

He took her in his arms and kissed her again.

She picked up the roses and started to the door. "You must go with me as far as the carriage, at any rate," she said.

"Don't take those, Madge," he requested her, holding out his hand for the roses.

"Why?" she paused in wonder. "I think they are beautiful."

"Yes; but I don't want you to carry them. I will tell you why some time."

"But, Paul, they match my dress perfectly. And, besides, it would not be nice to Mrs. Oxnard."

"It is because they are hers that I want you to throw them away," taking the roses and tossing them on the table.

"How strangely you act, Paul! Mrs. Oxnard seems to be a very sweet woman."

"Mrs. Oxnard has a way of seeming, Madge; I don't wish you to have anything to do with her."

"Dear me!" in bewilderment. "And she said you and she were such old friends. Well, you must tell me all about it when you get back."

Paul accompanied her to the carriage, returning more disappointed than he cared to admit to himself, that Madge, after all, had not remained.

"What a light-hearted girl she is," he thought, "and I'd be a brute to do anything to make her less so. But—"

He was interrupted by the voice of Lucy Oxnard, as she appeared in the doorway: "Mrs. Rodman! Oh, I beg pardon—has Madge gone? I think I must have dropped a letter in here a few moments ago."

Paul had seen no letter, and it was evident, on looking around, that it was not in the room. Lucy Oxnard, however, continued to search for it in a languid way, and Paul made a similar pretence.

"I wonder you are not at the Garnetts' to-night," she murmured. "By the way, I have never really had an opportunity to congratulate you since you married. I hope you are very happy?" her voice falling into the old dulcet key which he remembered so well.

"Thank you," he answered, peering under the piano in quest of the letter.

"Madge is such a simple, affectionate child," purred Lucy Oxnard, taking a book from the table and studying the title, "and we are already good friends. Indeed, I am quite charmed with her. But I hear that she goes out a great deal without you. I wonder that you allow that. She is so young and inexperienced, and so fond of admiration; while, as you know, people talk so much —"

"Mrs. Oxnard," facing her and addressing her with a directness that could not be misunderstood, "I hope you will not forget that it is my wife you are speaking of."

"Indeed, I do not! And neither do other

people. Why, society is already sympathizing with you, Paul, on account of the way the foolish child's head has been turned."

"Mrs. Oxnard, you did not leave your letter in here!"

Neither the words nor the emphasis with which they were spoken could have left a doubt as to his meaning, but Lucy Oxnard continued, apparently unruffled, —

"I consider it only the duty of a real friend — the person most concerned is usually the last to discover such things, you know — to tell you that everybody is commenting on Madge's dangerous flirtation with Fletch —"

"Stop! Mrs. Oxnard, I think I'd better inform you that I refused to permit Mrs. Rodman to carry the flowers you brought her this evening under a pretext of friendship. I regret that you have forced me to be thus explicit, and I hope it is unnecessary for me to say more."

"Perfectly unnecessary," she answered coolly. "And I hope it is unnecessary for me to say more to open your eyes to the — the indiscretion of your wife."

"Madame," Paul spoke imperatively, with colorless lips and flashing eyes, laying his

hand on the door and swinging it wide, "I must wish you good-evening."

"Thank you for reminding me of my obligations as a guest; but you have made yourself so agreeable that I have stayed much longer than I intended," she smiled over her shoulder as she slowly left the room. "*Au revoir.* Please send up the letter if you should find it, and — don't forget my advice about Madge."

Paul closed the door after her as if he were shutting it against a storm-gust; after which he threw some things vigorously into a travelling-bag, tried to read a paper, looked at his watch, and went down to the café.

XX

MADGE

A FEW minutes later Madge returned from the Garnetts', followed by Mrs. MacQuarrie, who was glowing with impatiently restrained excitement and out of breath from her efforts to keep pace with her younger companion.

Madge, too, was much agitated. Her step as she entered the room was quick and nervous; her cheeks were burning; her eyes were abnormally brilliant and set in what might have been read as an expression of startled fright and anger. She flung off her wraps, reckless of where they fell, and threw herself on the sofa with no longer the least consideration of the dainty dress; while the fragile fan which she held was already an irreparable ruin.

Mrs. MacQuarrie, with a sigh of relief, dropped into a chair.

"Goodness me!" she puffed. "What a chase you have led me up those stairs! I can

hardly breathe. And now, child, that we are here and alone, tell me what in the world is the matter?"

"Oh, don't ask me, please!" pleaded Madge, in a low tone, in which there was a slightly stridulous strain wholly foreign to her naturally limpid voice.

"Don't ask you!" fanning herself desperately. "Do you think I'm going to sit here and expire with curiosity? And you carrying on in this way!"

"Oh, it's nothing, — nothing that you can help me in," Madge answered, as if she were beyond all help.

"I won't believe that till you tell me. See here, child, do you know how long you stayed at Ellen Garnett's? Just twenty-five minutes, — twenty-five minutes! I looked at the clock myself in the dressing-room. And when you came rushing over to me all flustered and white, as if you had seen a — a cannibal, and vowed and declared you must go immediately, and would n't stay a second longer; and sat there in the carriage so awfully stiff all the way back; and when you got to the hotel and could n't even wait for the elevator, and forgot to say so much as good-night to poor Drewdie

Poteet, but just swished up the stairs like all possessed, with me running the risk of apostrophe of the heart trying to keep up with you, — do you suppose I'm going to sit here and believe there's nothing the matter with you, and that I'm going to leave this room until I know what it is?"

"It — oh! Mrs. MacQuarrie, it was those terrible people," Madge said, with a spasmodic effort.

"Goodness me! what terrible people?"

"I don't know — I don't know! I did n't look at them."

"Well, I never! What about them? Where were they? What did they do?"

"I — was standing in the reception room talking to that Mr. Keith, when all at once I heard two ladies near me say — such horrible things!"

"You did?" bending forward with alert interest. "What did they say, Madge?"

"They were talking about me; and one of them," halting with a slight shudder, "one of them said, 'There is that Mrs. Rodman with Fletcher Keith again.' And the other one — oh, Mrs. MacQuarrie, she said, 'It's simply shameful the way she carries on with every

man except her husband.' Then the first one said, 'Yes, and her flirtation with such a creature as Fletcher Keith is positively scandalous.' Then — then —" bowing her head in shame, "I hurried away and came to you."

"Pshaw! was that all?" And Mrs. MacQuarrie leaned back in her chair and folded up her fan in unconcealed disappointment. "Why, you little goose," with an amused laugh, "that was nothing! Women are always talking that way about other women when the other women are popular and have a better time than they do. Madge Rodman, if it was n't for the looks of it, I 'd take you right back this minute!"

"No! no! no! I could never face those people again. And I thought them all so pleasant," regretfully; "and everybody seemed so kind to me, and I tried to treat everybody the same way, because I was so happy. And now for them to say such cruel things about — about Paul and me, — oh, I can't understand it, and I can't bear it!"

"Come, you foolish child! There is n't anybody worth crying about. There never is! Besides, those women did n't mean any harm.

They only envy you. They 'd be only too glad to hear somebody say the same things about themselves."

"Surely you can't think that, Mrs. MacQuarrie!"

"Surely, what can I think, Mrs. Rodman? Am I to believe you are sitting there and telling me that you have n't heard such remarks made about other women in Louisville?"

"Do you mean that such remarks are common among nice people?"

"Common? They are as common as colds."

"And they still receive a woman they say such things about?"

"Well," Mrs. MacQuarrie laughed, "I never would have dreamed that a girl could have been six months in Louisville society and be such a delightful ignoramus. Receive her? They run after her. My stars! Your experience to-night simply proves that you are a success."

"Then I don't want to be a success!" Madge replied emphatically.

"Pooh! you need a good night's sleep. Come, let me put you to bed, and you 'll get up to-morrow all right for the Lindsay wedding."

"Oh, no! I'm not going. I don't feel as if I should ever care to go anywhere again."

"Fiddlesticks! You talk as if you were plumb out of your senses, child."

"I'm afraid I've just come to my senses, Mrs. MacQuarrie," Madge replied, with a pensive seriousness. "After to-night, and what they said about me, and what you've said, I don't see how I could help detesting so many things which I have liked before, even if I cared to keep on liking them."

"Madge, you'll positively make me ashamed of you. You are certainly not intending all of a sudden to settle down into a stay-at-home nobody, a humdrum drudge, are you? If you are, let me tell you right now that's the very worst policy you could follow with a husband like yours."

"Why, what are you talking about, Mrs. MacQuarrie?" Madge asked, with some evidence of alarm.

"It's plain enough what I'm talking about. It's as certain as anything that if you do as you threaten to do it will be the ruination of your husband as a husband."

"I don't think it necessary to discuss Paul,

Mrs. MacQuarrie," straightening up to a very pretty dignity.

"Well, I suppose I'd better speak right out. If you'll take my advice, you'll keep right on just as you've been doing. You have all the admiration, all the attention, all the envy, and all the clothes you could wish, and you have a husband who lets you do as you please. I'd like to know what more a woman could want? But if you change your tactics and go in for playing the humble domestic rôle, you not only lose your freedom, but you make an unendurable tyrant of your husband besides."

"Indeed," with spirit, "I don't see that that follows at all!"

"I do. I know more about husbands than you do, Madge. I've had two of them. And I know Paul Rodman like a book. He's just the kind of a man to want to make a slave of a woman if he is in love with her, and I never saw one's husband more ridiculously in love with her than he is with you."

Madge's face lit up with a sudden smile. "Oh-h!" she said, "and why should n't he be in love with me?"

"When you know as much about men as

I do," explained Mrs. MacQuarrie, now in excellent breath, "you 'll understand that if they are too much in love with their wives, they are almost sure to become jealous and exacting, and regular nuisances generally. Oh! I 've known Paul Rodman for a long time, and I 've watched him ever since you were married, and I tell you, Madge, he 's just the sort of man who wants his wife all to himself; who 'd like to settle down at home in his slippers at night and have her play for him, or read to him, or perch on the arm of his chair and pet the bald spot coming on his head, or sit on a footstool and lean against his knee and look moon-eyed things — and all that kind of sentimental folderol."

"Mrs. MacQuarrie," Madge asked gently, and with some hesitation, "do you really think that of Paul?"

"Think it? I know it! The man gazes on you as if he were absolutely hungry for you and were afraid you 'd fly away from him. Oh, I know that kind! He 's just like one of them I married, who wanted me to give up everything for him and mope around the house, and all that."

"And didn't that make you happy?" Madge asked, with wondering eyes.

"Make me happy? Perhaps it did; it made me get a divorce. I thought you knew that."

"You got a divorce because — because he loved you so much?"

"Pooh! I got a divorce because he wanted to monopolize me, — incompatibility, my lawyers called it. You can find plenty of men to love you, child, but what's the good of love if you're incompatible?"

There was a new charm of sweetness and seriousness on Madge's face as it drooped until her eyes were covered by the handkerchief which she held, and there was a quiver in her voice as she moaned, seemingly oblivious of Mrs. MacQuarrie's presence, —

"Oh, how foolish I have been, and how cold and heartless he must think me!"

"Who? What are you going on about, Madge Rodman? Who must think you so cold?"

"Paul."

"Gracious! you have to be cold — temperately cold — in that way. I tell you if you don't be, there's no saying how soon he'll

become the most unbridled Bluebeard. I believe he 's capable of almost any absurdity about a woman, if she is his wife. Now let me tell you something Jack promised he would n't say anything about. Since things have come to such a pass as this, you ought to be put on your guard."

"No; not if it is anything about Paul, and he does n't wish me to know it."

"There you go now! That 's what a woman might have said when she really believed she was nothing more than a man's rib. You 've called on my niece, Annie Fordham, have n't you?"

"Yes."

"Did you notice the stuffy little box of a house she and Jack Fordham are living in?"

"Yes."

"Well, that 's the cage your husband intended for you."

"For me?" suddenly emerging from the handkerchief. "Mrs. MacQuarrie, what do you mean?"

"I mean that Paul Rodman bought that house for you before you married him, and tinkered it up, and expected to stick you in it out there on the commons, and make you go

to drudging right from the start. A man's love never is anything but unadulterated selfishness, anyhow."

"Paul bought that house for — for us?" a rare softness in her voice.

"But he found, thanks to your good sense, that you had some spirit of your own and objected to becoming a mere domestic, and so he leased the cottage to Jack and Annie, poor things! But, my word for it, he has n't given up the idea of getting you into it yet. The only way to manage a man is never to yield the first inch to him. If you do, you might as well put on his collar and chain and be done with it."

"Mrs. MacQuarrie," Madge spoke eagerly, "the house is still ours, is n't it? When does the Fordhams' lease end?"

"Oh, I don't know; probably next January."

"You must tell them that we shall want the house then."

"What?" explosively.

Madge, beaming now, jumped up suddenly, wringing one hand impetuously in the other.

"And, oh," she cried, "if they could only get another place this week and let me move in before Paul returns from New York! Don't

you think they could, Mrs. MacQuarrie?" springing to that worthy soul's side and winding an arm about her neck.

"Madge Rodman, what on earth are you driving at?"

"Oh, it would be such a surprise for Paul to find me housekeeping when he comes back!" enthusiastically.

"My stars alive! are you stark, stone crazy? You don't mean to stand here before my very eyes and tell me you are going to housekeeping, after all — and before your honeymoon is fairly over."

"I 'm wild to do it," Madge laughed.

"And after having held out against him this long, too! It 's — it 's downright suicide!"

"But I don't want to hold out against him! I did n't know I was holding out against him! And I 'm going to see the Fordhams the first thing to-morrow. Won't you please go with me and help arrange it, Mrs. MacQuarrie?"

"I 'm going to bed, and you do the same, Madge Rodman!" Mrs. MacQuarrie exclaimed, bouncing up. "I sha'n't talk to you any more until you 've had a good night's sleep and are yourself again."

"Dear Mrs. MacQuarrie," Madge answered

gently, taking the other's hand, "I am myself again."

"Foolish girl!" Mrs. MacQuarrie said, with a kiss; but there was more tenderness in the kiss and in the tone than she had ever before shown for Madge.

XXI

FLETCHER KEITH DEVELOPS A TASTE FOR CHOPIN

MRS. MACQUARRIE'S departure left Madge in a turmoil of varying emotions. She was very remorseful over what she deemed her blind heartlessness to Paul, but she was exhilarated by the thought of the amends she intended to make. Precipitately sweeping aside the practical difficulties in the way, she was impatient to begin her amends at once by taking possession of the house he had provided for her, and she was the more impatient because the disclosure of the existence of such a house was a revelation of a phase of Paul's care for her, as well as of his own inclinations, which smote her with a morbid sense of frivolity and guilt. She recalled, with a pang that made her eyes misty, how flippantly, in her giddy inapprehension, she had parried his suggestion, months before, that she go with him to look at a house which he thought would suit her. How delicate and considerate

it was! And yet she felt a spark of resentment because he had not been less delicate.

And all this gay season she had rarely spent an evening alone with him, when, as she now saw, such evenings would have meant so much to him, and, in this new light that had broken upon her, so much also to her.

But it would be very different in the future. With her hands lying clasped in her lap, and her eyes resting dreamily on them, she thought out the details of her little plot, by which, with the help of the Fordhams, she hoped to surprise Paul on his return from New York.

Suddenly her lips parted with a happy smile, and she almost ran across the room to a writing-desk. Although Paul could not be more than a few miles out of Louisville, she was eager to write to him. She laid out the paper with tremulous haste. There was so much that she wished to say, which she could not wait till his return to say, and which she had never thought of saying before to-night. She would write him a long, long letter, such as she had never written before, and he should hardly reach New York before it should follow him.

She had impulsively begun the letter when

she paused abruptly and, with her elbow resting on the desk, held the pen suspended above the paper for a second; then she dropped the pen and covered her face with her hands. She did not know — in her excitement about the ball she had not thought to ask — Paul's address in New York.

She sat thus for several minutes, tormenting herself with accusations and confessions of shallowness and selfishness and with thoughts of Paul's loving forbearance. Then she took from the desk an old photograph of Paul and gazed at it long through tears; rising, she went abstractedly from object to object in the room, at last picking up *Vignettes in Rhyme* and turning to the poem from which he had read to her. She ran over it breathlessly, every line having now a personal and exaggerated meaning. She read it again, more slowly, and still again; and the next quarter of an hour passed with her face buried among the sofa pillows. A prolonged locomotive whistle sounded through the stillness; and she went to a window and stood listening desolately to the faint roll of a train until it died away. She left the window and sat down listlessly at the piano. She turned over the

music with aimless hands, pausing as she came to a copy of Chopin's *Berceuse* in D flat. It was a favorite of Paul's, and she opened it and set it before her.

As she began playing it softly, the corridor door, which she had not noticed had been left slightly ajar on Mrs. McQuarrie's exit, was pushed open and a man entered the room. He was in evening dress; he carried his hat and his gloves in his hand, and the fever of wine was on his handsome face.

Madge saw him as he advanced toward her, and springing from her seat she turned upon him in a pitiable flutter of anger and terror.

"Mr. Keith!" she said in a low voice, tremulously uncertain, "what does this mean?"

"Nothing in particular," he answered cheerfully. "Only I heard you playing as I passed by on my way to my room, and thought I'd look in on you for a moment. Just got in from the Garnetts'," sauntering nearer.

"Surely," coldly and with more control, receding a step as she spoke, "you must know I do not receive callers at such an hour as this!"

"I beg pardon; but it is not at all late, — hardly more than eleven yet. Besides, I only

stopped to inquire why you deserted the Garnetts' so soon this evening. Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Mr. Keith, I must ask you to leave at once! And please remember you have not my permission to call on me at all."

"Certainly," with an equanimity which was unshaken except for the wine he had drunk; "but I beg to assure Mrs. Rodman that I am always at her command. You were playing Chopin, I believe, when I came in," bending over the music on the piano. "If, at any time, I can be of any service whatever, you can easily summon me by striking a few notes of the *Berceuse*, and I shall be only too happy to respond at once. My room is but a few doors down the corridor."

Madge, white and quivering, crossed swiftly to the electric button in the wall.

"If you do not leave at once," she said in intense wrath, from which all fear had been burnt out, "I shall ring and have you expelled."

"Mrs. Rodman is unduly and, I must say, inexplicably, excited by an offer of mere neighborly civility," moving easily toward the door. "I trust she will be her own charming

and gracious self once more by to-morrow. Meanwhile, till we meet again."

He bowed deferentially, and turning drew back the partially open door. As he did so he recoiled slightly, for there was a sudden stir within three feet of him as Lucy Oxnard glided away rapidly down the corridor.

Keith, recovering instantly from his surprise, passed out with a smile, gently closing the door after him.

Madge, who, standing near the wall, had seen nothing of this pantomime, rushed forward as the door was closed, and shot the bolt.

Then reeling to a chair, she sank on her knees beside it, and bowing her head on her folded arms, shook with a repressed storm of impassioned sobs.

XXII

THE SIGNAL

PAUL RODMAN had left the café, chatted a while with some acquaintances in the lobby, walked to his office, and returned to the hotel for his bag. Stepping from the elevator, he came upon Lucy Oxnard, who was just starting up the stairs to the floor above.

He was passing on, but she called to him, almost in a whisper, and with imperative sharpness, —

"Mr. Rodman!"

He stopped, with an ill-concealed look of impatience. She was standing above him, at the curve of the stairway, holding her skirts with one hand, while with the other she clung to the balustrade as she leaned lithely over it toward him. Her color was unusually high, and her eyes were lit triumphantly as she spoke, —

"Paul Rodman, you insulted me to-night because I dared to hint that your wife is

not the guileless baby you pretend to believe her. If you had been a minute earlier, you would have seen the proof with your own eyes. But you can see it yet. Go to her and ask her to play Chopin's *Berceuse;* that is the signal by which she calls Fletcher Keith to her."

Paul took an involuntary step forward, as if to crush her in his clenched hand, as she vanished up the stairs with a mellow laugh.

It was not the import of her words which affected him; it was the saying of them. That any one should dare to speak thus of Madge, and to him, astounded him, while it infuriated him all the more because he was impotent, on account of the speaker's sex, to resent the outrage in the way in which every muscle of his body and every instinct of his manhood impelled him to resent it.

He started up the corridor toward his rooms with a quickened stride, moved by a vague impulse to shield Madge, as if from some threatening danger, but his impetus relaxed as it occurred to him that Madge was still at the Garnetts'.

Reaching his door and turning the key in

the lock, he was surprised to find that the bolt had been sprung.

"Who's there?" came in a faint, terrified voice from within.

"It is I, — Paul," he answered reassuringly.

There was a rush of rustling skirts, the door was quickly flung open, and as Paul stepped into the room, Madge, her face tear-stained and pathetically wrought since he had last seen it, threw herself into his arms with a broken cry of joy.

"Why, Madge, what is the matter?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh, I'm so glad you have come back!" was her hysterical reply.

"What is troubling you, dear?" completely mystified.

"And you will not leave me? Not to-night, Paul, — never, never leave me again!"

"Not if you need me, Madge. There, I will postpone my trip altogether."

She clung to him closely, her choking sobs convulsing her delicate frame. He gently soothed her, finally drawing her to a seat on the sofa, where she soon became more calm, resting against him in contented silence, which was broken only by an occasional short

sigh, a faint echo of the gust of emotion which had passed.

Paul was thoroughly perplexed, for evidently Madge had been profoundly affected. As he had just met Lucy Oxnard, he surmised that perhaps she had been with Madge again and had wounded her in some vicious way of which Lucy was fully capable.

"If," he said lightly, as he stroked the hand he held, "it is anything Mrs. Oxnard has been doing, you must not mind it at all, dear. A world of women like her is not worth one of your tears."

Madge raised her eyes gratefully, but there was a deprecating look of pain in them that caused him to draw her closer to him as she answered, —

"No, no! I have not seen Mrs. Oxnard again. It is — oh, something has happened, Paul, to show me how — how desperately wicked I have been."

Paul smiled in spite of himself.

"And did this something — this awful something — happen to-night?" he asked.

"Yes; at Mrs. Garnett's," dropping her lashes as if to hide the shame which began stealing into her cheeks.

Then with timorous words that halted and tripped over her sensitive mortification, she told him what the gossips had said of her at Mrs. Garnett's. And when, hearing from him no response of reproof or condemnation, she ventured a shy glance to learn whether he looked the reproach he did not speak, and saw in his eyes only the soft radiance of love, she hid her face on his shoulder and lifted his hand to her lips.

"Poor girl!" he said, as if to himself, "they would rob her of even youth itself."

And then, as she rested in his arms as a child might have nestled, he comforted her and reassured her as only one who at last thoroughly understood her could have done.

"But I 'm glad it happened, after all," she said, with a face like a wild rose after a rain, "because — because it has shown me my heart." And after a short pause she added: "I learned something else to-night, too. Paul, why did you never tell me about the house you bought for us?"

"How did you hear of that?" he asked, a touch of displeasure in his tone.

"Never mind. But it was like you. And

it made me so unhappy, and then it made me so happy."

"What a paradoxical wiseacre you have grown to be! You are really getting beyond my depth."

"Oh, you need not laugh! I was never so miserable before as I was to-night when I came to realize how good you have been and how frivolous I have been. No, you sha'n't say anything now! You may believe it was n't heartlessness, if you can, — only thoughtlessness. It must have been that I was just so happy I never had any room for thought. But I never did think much — only when I was unhappy — only when you left us so suddenly that evening in Tennessee. Why, if I had only just thought how much nicer it would be to live in our own home, I should n't have wanted to stay here a day longer; and I almost feel like quarrelling with you because you did n't *make* me think of it. Perhaps you imagine," with a coquettish air of reproach, "that I can't think. I really believe you do, from the way you have treated me, and from the way you are laughing."

"No," said Paul, with a new note of glad content; "but you were happy as you were,

and thinking does not always bring happiness."

"But," she answered gravely, "I have come to understand that it brings the truest and deepest happiness."

Was it, indeed, another Madge, or was it only the Madge that from the first he had felt she could be, some day? Paul was in no doubt on that point; and drawing her to him again, he kissed her as he had never kissed her before.

After which she disclosed to him her housekeeping plot. "And there are so many other things I want to tell you about," she said. "Only wait till I change this hateful dress, and then we'll have a good, long talk."

She rose and ran into the next room, the truth being that she was in doubt whether she ought to inform him about Keith's call that evening, at the risk of the violence that might result between the two men; her object in leaving Paul being as much to gain time to consider more calmly the best course for her to follow as it was to change her dress. Poor Madge! she was right when she said she had never done much thinking, and now that she was confronted with a problem that seemed to

her to require deliberation she felt sorely the need of time and composure.

Paul sat as she had left him, his trip to New York and all else, except Madge and his own happiness, forgotten. The hour that he had lived for had come. Despite the blasting experience of his past, the most sanguine dreams of his youth and the deepest longings of his maturer years had at last found realization. Henceforth life for him was, indeed, complete.

He rose, after a little, and began walking to and fro across the room. In the absence of Madge he was impelled to some sort of bodily motion as an accompaniment to the glorious unrest of his brain and heart.

Once, as he walked, his foot struck against something lying on the floor. He paid no attention to it at first, but his eyes falling on it repeatedly as he passed it, he finally stooped and picked it up. It was a glove, a man's glove, and he turned it desultorily in his hand, wondering idly how it came there.

He crossed over to the piano; and as he was about to drop the glove on the instrument his extended arm grew suddenly rigid and his grasp on the glove tightened. A piece of music stood open on the piano before him.

"Ask her to play Chopin's *Berceuse;* that is the signal by which she calls Fletcher Keith to her," were the words he had heard not an hour ago. Whose glove was that? Why was the *Berceuse* open and in place on the piano? A "signal"? It was verily a signal that summoned out of his past all the demons of memory to lash him in one mad moment into an insane frenzy of doubt and fear. Doubt and fear of what? Who can say? What does the madman doubt and fear? Did he not know that Madge was above all suspicion, as surely as he knew that somewhere, on earth or beyond, truth lived? But once before he had stood on the brink of happiness with a supreme faith, and with what result it appalled him to remember. There was the glove, and there was the *Berceuse* — and, angels of innocence! there was Madge, coming slowly toward him in a soft, white wrapper, her beautiful hair falling over her shoulders, her face delicately aglow with a tender joy, her eyes duskily luminous with an infinite love.

If there is a tutelary deity for such as Paul, and it could have made itself heard by him at this moment, it must have been in words something like these, —

"Quick and sure; for now is the crisis of your life, and it is in your hands. Whatever you have been, whatever you have hoped to be, this moment must decide what you are to be through all your future."

It was over. "Madge," Paul asked, with a forced precision and calm, "will you not play for me?"

Then it was that this deity must have added, —

"Farewell, once lofty-souled youth. The fiends that beset such as you have won. For as you spoke you uttered the one blasphemy against woman, wife, and, most of all, against your own manhood; and even as you spoke, you knew it."

Madge glided up to him with a faint smile on her lips and fondly took his hand.

"Yes, if you wish me," she answered softly. "What shall I play?" seating herself at the piano and placing his hand, which she held in her own, caressingly upon her shoulder.

"This," replied Paul, in a low voice, and with a white face which she did not see.

Madge withdrew her hand from his and dropped it to the keys, at the same time

turning her eyes to the music which he had indicated.

"No! no! not that!" rising suddenly and tremulously, her face as white as his own.

"Why not that?"

"Oh! I — I think it detestable. Would n't you like something else?" abruptly beginning to search through the music on the piano with nervous, hurrying hands.

"Since when have you thought it detestable? Madge, I prefer you should play this."

There was that in his voice which she had never heard before, and which caused her to discontinue at once her aimless rummage of the music and to turn her troubled, wondering eyes full upon him.

"I — can't," she said, almost in a whisper.

"Play it."

There was no mistaking the command now, and it struck Madge dumb. She could not have answered him if she would. With dilated eyes and half-parted lips, she could only stand and gaze at him in helpless silence.

"Then I will," he said, stepping to the piano.

"Oh, no! no!" She found speech in a

beseeching, terrified wail, and grasped his arm to stay it. "Wait! I will tell you why, Paul!"

He pushed her away and began playing the *Berceuse*.

As he did so, Madge quailed and shrank from him, sinking weakly for a second against a chair; then recovering and drawing herself to her height, she stood mute and pale, her eyes fastened on Paul, as if under a spell of horror, while he gently touched the keys.

A moment more, and the door was opened from the corridor, and Fletcher Keith, with a light, rapid step, entered the room.

Paul was on his feet in an instant, but Madge never stirred nor took her staring eyes from him as he turned and, deathly calm, confronted the intruder.

Keith, suddenly sobered, bowed. "I beg pardon; I—"

"You have come for your glove, perhaps," Paul said with preternatural quietness; "you will find it on the piano."

Keith hesitated a moment, then went to the piano and picked up the glove.

"Mr. Rodman," he began, facing Paul again, "I certainly owe both Mrs. Rodman and yourself an apol—"

Paul checked him with a gesture. "I will see you downstairs in five minutes, if you please," he said.

"Very well, sir," Keith assented, and with a slight bow left the room.

Paul, not once looking at Madge where she stood, motionless and silent, went into the next room, placed a pistol in his pocket, and got his overcoat, hat, and travelling-bag. As he passed through the parlor again, he knew that Madge was now seated, and he felt that her eyes followed him; but he walked on into the corridor and closed the door behind him without a word and without turning his head toward her.

XXIII

MERELY TO KILL A MAN OR BE KILLED

"MR. KEITH just left word that he would be in the billiard-room, Mr. Rodman," a bell boy informed Paul as he reached the lobby.

Keith, who was seated in one of the big leather chairs, smoking a cigar, rose and stood waiting as Paul entered the otherwise deserted billiard-room.

Paul went up to him, and the two men faced each other for a moment in silence.

"I think," Paul said grimly, "that there is no occasion for any publicity in the settlement that is to be between us."

Keith nodded. "That must be as you prefer," he replied. "But first you must let me tell you that you have made a terrible mistake if you believe that anybody but myself is to be blamed for what happened to-night; that Mrs. Rodman had anything to do with —"

"Stop!" Paul ordered peremptorily. "This is an affair between you and myself alone.

No one else is to be brought into it. And don't *you* make the mistake of expecting that anything a man like you can say is worth listening to, or will be listened to."

Keith's eyes seemed to grow smaller and more fixed as he kept them on Paul. It was now steel against steel.

"Very well then, damn you! If there is anything to be said, say it yourself."

"I had intended leaving for New York to-night," Paul declared. "It occurs to me that the railroad runs through some wild and lonely regions in the Alleghanies, and that none offers greater privacy than that around Probyn, where I met you hunting a year or two ago. If you will join me there, I will get off at Probyn."

"That will be agreeable to me."

Paul looked at his watch. "There is yet nearly an hour to catch this train. If you will manage it, we shall save time."

"There need be no occasion for delay. We shall reach Probyn by the same train."

Paul, nodding his satisfaction, turned and left, going directly to the station, where he took his sleeper.

He declined to have his berth made up, but

sat crouched against the cushion, staring stolidly at the plush opposite.

His eyes never varied their one focus until the train moved out, although he knew when Keith got on the same sleeper, hesitated, and passed through to the next.

For the rest of the night and throughout the next day Paul sat there in his section of the car, rarely changing his position. Sometimes his eyes were fixed on vacancy; sometimes on a newspaper, but still on vacancy; sometimes they were closed, though never in sleep. It was as if his physical functions were suspended. He did not get sleepy, hungry, or thirsty. His body had merely become a part of the inert matter around him over which the train rumbled. The one living thing in it all was the engine, — life throbbing, grinding, cleaving through death. Occasionally he saw it as it plunged around a curve, a grimy bolt of invincible vitality, superb in its beauty and power, the living driving on to the living, to the same unceasing purpose that wheels the planets in their orbits, and ever leaving him behind among the dun earth and rotting rock over which it sped, yet leaving him glorying dully in its mighty force, as an atom

of the dust whirled in its wake might glory in it.

Again, the pulse of this mighty force beating through his brain seemed the pulse that stirred interminably the current of the seething and sullen fury within him, and mockingly prevented his mind from sinking into the lethargy of his body. Nor did this pulse cease during the hours when the engine stood still, waiting the removal of a freight wreck from the track. The long stop in the woods, which so chafed with impatience many of the other passengers, had no effect on him. It did not matter to him whether the train was on time or losing time, moving or standing. Nothing could matter much to one who had nothing ahead of him except merely to kill a man or be killed by him. That one little signal light of purpose, burning in the eternal blackness of the measureless void which was to be his future, living or dead, was so trivial in comparison with the void itself that it was of no consequence whether he reached the light a few hours sooner or later.

He reached it sooner than he had expected. Early that night, as the train was spinning along the crest of the Alleghanies, he got up from his

seat and made his way through the rear car to the back platform. As he stepped out on it and closed the door, he saw that a man was already standing on the platform, leaning against the end of the coach and smoking a cigar. The glance that showed it was Keith left an instantly formed purpose with Paul Rodman. Turning from Keith, he made a swift survey of the scene. Before and around him the great domes of the mountains stretched away in billow after billow, magnified and mystified in the splendor of the full moon which rode among them. The rails glistened out along a ledge that was sometimes a natural shelf, sometimes cut from the mountain wall. On one side he could have leaned over and touched the lichened rock of this wall, while on the other he could see sheer down into dark chasms and ravines. He recognized this section of the road. There was a long stretch of such track here.

He turned again to Keith.

"It has just occurred to me that there is no need of our stopping at Probyn," he said.

"No?" Keith asked, eying him curiously.

"One of us might fall off the platform here."

Keith did not answer for a little. "Yes,

I see," he then said, removing the cigar from his lips.

"It would be much preferable to the Probyn plan. There would be no gossip. It would simply be an accident of travel."

"That is plausible," Keith responded after a short interval of reflection; "and the one who did n't fall off would not be bothered by any meddlesomeness of the law."

"If you are not acquainted with the road along here, you ought to know that it is pretty much like this for a mile or two yet; and that while a man falling off on that side would be apt to be dashed to pieces on the rocks, there could hardly be any doubt as to the result of a fall on this side, a hundred feet or so into the ravine."

"I see. To make a perfect fall it should be on the ravine side."

"I think we understand each other now."

Paul took a step nearer Keith and waited; Keith tossed his cigar away; two pale, set faces confronted a moment in the moonlight; then the men grappled.

Paul's words had been cooler than he was. He was fiercely aggressive on the instant. He threw himself with all his power on Keith, hurl-

ing him against the wall of the car and gripping around him the cables of his arms until Keith's ribs would have been crushed into his heart if he had known less what he was about.

For the first minute Keith was warily on the defensive. The lock of the two was never broken, but twice Paul slung Keith from the wall of the car to the rail of the platform, and twice Keith, with a well-timed adroitness, swung back to his base against the car, on the momentum of Paul's desperate effort.

The advantage to this point was with Keith. If he could keep up his tactics, they would ultimately place Paul at his mercy. No human being could long subject his powers to such a tremendous tax as Paul was doing without exhausting them.

Paul, poising himself for two seconds in the middle of the platform, steeled every sinew for another onslaught. He drove the breath from Keith's body with the embrace of a boa, and then, suddenly crouching and lifting forward, wrenched Keith from the wall. Keith tried his old trick, but was too slow this time. Paul, catching his balance between Keith and the car, straightened and bore over on him before he could right himself, and Keith went

down across the railing of the platform as if a bowlder from the mountain had fallen on him. Paul could have shoved him off easily, but instead he clutched him by the collar and jerked him back. Keith had been forced across the railing on the cliff side of the track; Paul pulled him back and pushed him toward the ravine side.

But Keith, recovering himself in the mean time, was now steady on his feet again, and planting his shoulder against Paul's stood rigidly immovable.

Each knew now that the time had come. Each adjusted and tightened his hold on the other. Each made sure of his footing and gathered his breath. Shoulder to shoulder, hip to hip, each set his joints and tautened his muscles for the final test. No mere trickery or cleverness could win now. It was pound against pound, will against will, man against man.

No word passed their lips, which nothing had escaped throughout the struggle, except stertorous breathing and occasionally the harsh guttural deep in the throat of the wild beast. Even their breathing now seemed to have ceased; and as they stood thus braced

against each other in the moonlight, their jaws clamped, the veins on their necks and temples swollen welts, their eyes straining protuberantly, they were absolutely motionless except for the slow titanic convulsions of the thews, like those sometimes seen on the pinioned body swung from a gallows, and there was no sound save the rhythmic roll of the car wheels and the panting stress of the engine far ahead, which seemed to be the respiration of this death struggle.

For twenty seconds they must have stood thus buttressed against each other. Neither had yet yielded the inch nor weakened the ounce that must surely mean the end, but one must inevitably do it before twenty heart-beats more. Then, as each nerved himself for the last strain when he knew that something must bend or break, the car lurched suddenly around a curve, Keith's foot slipped, and the two, locked together, went over into the ravine.

XXIV

AMONG THE BUCKWALTERS

It is not proposed to invade the seclusion of Madge Rodman during the weeks that followed Paul's departure, further than to say that there were long nights of tears in the darkness, long days of alert expectation of a letter, a telegram, a footstep; a face thinner from the protracted tension of uncertainty and fear; eyes, which had never lost the startled, stricken bewilderment that had come into them as Paul began to play the *Berceuse*, growing bigger and wearier, as time passed, with the cruel mystery they could not fathom; moments of suddenly summoned pride, passionate rebellion, and brave resolution, only to collapse as suddenly in agonized humility and prayer. But as the days lengthened into weeks and brought no message or tidings, such transitions became less frequent and less violent, giving way to at least an apparent calm, that was at once the stamp of mental

and physical exhaustion, and of a constant foreboding, settling daily toward a conviction, of perpetual hopelessness.

Paul's prolonged and unexplained absence was having other effects in Louisville than to drive hope and youth out of a girl's face. The first week after Paul left, Drewdie Poteet, at the office of the Fluor-spar Company, thought nothing of it except that Paul was detained in New York by the business which had taken him there. By the end of the second week, when a letter and a telegram had failed to find Paul in New York, Drewdie began to ask himself questions, and being unable to answer them satisfactorily called Barney Carruthers into consultation. The result of this was that Drewdie, who had failed to make inquiries of Madge for fear of alarming her, went immediately to see her, returning with the report that she had heard nothing from Paul, that "she seemed awfully done up," and that she wanted Barney Carruthers at once.

What Barney learned at that interview with Madge he did not disclose, but when he came back to the Fluor-spar office he was walking more swiftly than Drewdie had ever known

him to walk, and there were two little whitish spots on his cheek-bones, which Drewdie had seen before when Barney was greatly excited.

"I 'm going to hunt for him," Barney informed Drewdie Poteet. "I 'll post you as to where I am, and you let me know if anything turns up. In the mean time you keep your mouth shut. All you need to know is that he has gone to New York on business, and that he has not notified you when he will return; and you don't need to know that except when you are questioned."

The trail that Barney Carruthers took led him to New York, but he could find no trace of Paul there, though he did discover that Fletcher Keith had sailed for Liverpool two weeks before. On the second day after Barney's arrival in New York, he received a telegram from Drewdie Poteet reporting that there were ugly rumors in Louisville regarding Paul and the Fluor-spar Company, and that there were symptoms of an impending panic among the stockholders. Barney at once employed a private detective to continue quietly the search for Paul Rodman, and hastened back to Louisville.

He found that Drewdie's telegram was not an exaggeration. Not only was there percolating Main and Fifth streets irresponsible gossip about Paul's absence, involving the solvency of the Fluor-spar Company and even the integrity of Paul, but *The Runabout* had published this paragraph, which, though it was bare of names, needed none to make it explicit among those it was intended to affect: —

"There are indications of a coming crash in business circles, and the knowing ones are passing along the whisper to stand from under. The concern was organized less than two years ago by a young Southerner, who somehow gained the confidence of small investors, and who has since been rolling pretty high in social swelldom. The stock has been a favorite recently among local speculators, but the fact that it has tobogganed in the last few weeks from around 130 to only a few points above par is taken as evidence that they have already caught a whiff of something aromatic in Denmark. They will catch something more than a whiff when they learn from *The Runabout* this morning that insiders, who have been shrewd enough to become outsiders in the last two weeks, are our authority for the statement that the president of the company has been mysteriously missing for about three weeks now, and that the books will unquestionably show a heavy shortage."

The Runabout appeared on Sundays only. When Barney Carruthers reached Louisville Sunday morning, Drewdie Poteet, already well advanced toward the panic, was waiting at the station with a copy of the paper. Barney read the paragraph twice, the whitish spots blossoming out on his cheek-bones.

"Well, Drewdie, old man," he said, "we 've got to put in a big day's work breaking the Sabbath."

Barney Carruthers, in addition to his personal relations with Paul Rodman, was a director of the Fluor-spar Company and also its attorney. He knew that whatever was to be done to counteract the effect of *The Runabout's* slander should be done before Monday morning, and he was determined that everything that he could do to that end should be done.

"You get the directors together for a meeting at four o'clock this afternoon; I 'm going to try, the first thing, to find out who put this thing in *The Runabout*."

But he did not find out that day. The editor of *The Runabout* owed his unbroken head to two facts. One was that most of the victims of his irresponsible pen did not care

to have anything to do with such a creature, even to break his head; the other was his prudence in keeping his head out of the reach of those who had provocation to break it. He kept it well out of reach to-day, and Barney Carruthers finally abandoned his search for the fellow and went to see two or three capitalists whom he hoped to interest in Fluor-spar. But his visits were all unsuccessful; and when at four o'clock he entered the office of the company to attend the directors' meeting, he had done none of the things he had tried to do.

The directors were all present, — six, including Barney Carruthers. Besides Barney, only one, Buckwalter, owned as much stock as $1,000; the others, with the exception of Slade, the former shanty-boat dweller who had been helped in building his house by Paul, were either dejected or alarmed. Pritchard, a man with a thin, blue face, cleanly shaved except for a bunch of hair on the chin, was fumbling among the books and asking Drewdie Poteet querulous, random questions.

"Gentlemen," Barney Carruthers said, after he had shaken hands with the directors and cracked a joke at one of the dejected, "I sup-

pose you all have an idea what we are here for. It is plain that somebody is setting in circulation damaging rumors against our company. When we find the persons or person who inspired the publication in this morning's *Runabout*, we 'll know how to proceed. *The Runabout* itself does n't count. It has nothing, — not even an editor when you want him most. The man or men who are at the bottom of this business are clearly working it as a stock-gambling trick, or as a scheme to gobble up a majority of the shares and get possession of the mines. When we find them, it will be easy to spike their guns. But meanwhile a great deal of mischief may be done, — not really to the company itself, but to its stockholders. You know that our stock is held largely by people of small means, who are most quickly and causelessly frightened. If some step is not taken to prevent it by to-morrow morning, they will be throwing their stock overboard at any price, and you are likely to see the sharks swallowing it at as low as 50 by to-morrow afternoon. I know that if Paul Rodman were here, his first thought would be, not only to save the credit of the company, but to prevent this

needless sacrifice of their stock by the small holders."

"That 's just the p'int," rasped Pritchard. "Where is Rodman? Why ain't he here?"

"I shall probably answer that question definitely in a day or two. At present it is enough for us to know that he left on the company's affairs, and that he can have no knowledge of the tactics that are being played against him in his absence. It is our business to protect the property until his return. My proposition is that we guarantee a fund to take at par any stock that may be offered. The stock, which was issued at par, sold yesterday at 105; if we put an advertisement in to-morrow morning's papers, say in the name of some responsible broker, offering par for the stock, nobody will sell for less than par, and very few if any, will sell at par. If they do, we shall have the stock, which we know is worth the money, and which is pretty sure to sell 20 or 30 points above par when we stop the raid of these scoundrels, and, besides, we shall prevent many poor people from throwing away stock which they can't afford to lose. What do you say, gentlemen?

I 'm willing to put down every dollar I can raise, though that ain't much. What will you do, Mr. Buckwalter? It would n't trouble you to guarantee the whole fund."

"Count me out, Carruthers," answered Buckwalter, reclining comfortably in Paul's chair. "I never mix business and charity. If Fluor-spar stock is going to sell for 50 to-morrow, I may take some, but it will be at 50, not at par. I never pay more than the market price for anything."

"But if it would keep your own stock from going down, Mr. Buckwalter?" suggested Slade.

"I have n't enough stock to hurt. Besides, if Fluor-spar goes down because lies are started against it, it will go up again when the truth overtakes them. Your scheme won't work, Carruthers. You can't get fools to put up money to keep other fools from losing money."

"That 's my ticket," Pritchard sang out. "No guarantee from me. But say, Carruthers, if you raise the money, maybe I 'll sell you my stock at par. It looks a little quare that Rodman ain't here, and nobody knowin' when he 'll turn up."

"How much stock have you, Pritchard?" Barney asked.

"Oh, well, maybe not so much as more, and not so little as less."

"Drewdie, turn to the books there and find out how much stock Mr. Pritchard owns."

"Oh! never mind, Poteet," Pritchard interposed. "If Carruthers means business, I reckon I can refresh my memory. I believe I 'm the owner of two sheers."

"All right. If you want to sell at par, say so."

"Well, I 'll let you know to-morrow."

"To-morrow will be too late — for you."

"Oh, well, I reckon I 'll resk it a while longer."

"Then understand one thing, Pritchard. You are a director of this company. If you know anything wrong or suspect anything wrong, it 's your duty to say so, and say how and why. But you must say it only to the board. Loose talk outside is the trouble already, and bear in mind that the loose talkers are going to be run down, and that when they are, something unpleasant is going to happen to them. Is there any other gentleman who will come in on my proposition, or is

there anybody who has any other proposition to make?"

Nobody spoke until finally Slade got up from his chair.

"Mr. Carruthers," he said, though he was looking at Pritchard, "I ain't got but a little, but you can put me down for my last cent. I 'm not afraid that anything Paul Rodman's behind ain't worth par. And when them loose talkers are caught, I know two or three boys down in my neighborhood who want to have a hand in what happens to them."

"There 's another p'int," resumed Pritchard, contemptuously ignoring Slade. "The books shows there 's a big note due putty soon."

"Yes," replied Barney, "secured by a mortgage and now held by Judd Oxnard, who declines to renew."

"What provision has been made to pay it?"

"You may have noticed a pretty considerable item of United States bonds. They have been set aside for that purpose."

"And where is them bonds?"

"Have you looked in that old cigar-box on the mantel there? I believe that is where Paul keeps the stray bonds and things, especially on Sunday."

"I see the bonds was took in on April 10. Poteet tells me that Rodman left town on that very night. Now, gentlemen, as a director of this company, I demand to know where is them bonds and where is Paul Rodman?"

Slade, hot-faced, sprang to his feet again, but Barney Carruthers laid a detaining hand on him and stepped between him and Pritchard.

"As a director of this company," he said, "I tell you that the note will be paid promptly when due. If you have a personal curiosity to know the exact whereabouts of the bonds and Paul Rodman, you might sell a few shares of your stock, and organize a search expedition. Gentlemen, I move that we appoint Pritchard a committee of one to find those bonds and Rodman, at his own expense, even if he has to go to the North Pole or to the end of his stock to do it."

There was a general laugh, and Pritchard surrendered.

"Well," he concluded, "if you say the mortgage will be paid promptly, I reckon that 's enough."

The meeting adjourned soon afterward, the

majority of the directors agreeing that nothing could be done except to trace the libels against the company to their source and take such action then as might be expedient.

"We 'd better not have got them together," Barney Carruthers said, as he and Drewdie Poteet sat gloomily in the office after the others had left. "It 's done no good and probably some harm."

"Yes, it started that row of Pritchard's about the mortgage and the bonds. Where do you suppose those bonds are, Barney?"

"I pass," meditatively.

"And Rod?"

"Ditto."

"And how is that mortgage to be paid?"

"Ditto."

"What did you mean when you said it would be paid promptly?"

"A cold bluff."

Drewdie laughed slightly. "I thought so; but you did it so well I almost believed you."

"I don't know any more than you do how it is to be paid," Barney added. "But there 's one thing certain: it 's got to be paid, Drewdie Poteet, if you and I have to go out and hold up a train to get the money."

"It will be worse than *The Runabout* stuff if it becomes known that we default on that note, as it will when suit is brought to foreclose the mortgage."

"Worse! Of course. But we've got two weeks or more to raise that money, and we've got only until to-morrow morning to prevent this panic in Fluor-spar, and the slander of Rod that would go with it."

"What would n't I give," Drewdie sighed, "if I only had what I paid for that old skate, Doublequick!"

Barney laughed. "I reckon he was worth the money to you in experience."

"I've still got a little Fluor-spar stock. Maybe I could sell it, or borrow something on it."

"To throw it on the market now is just what you must n't do, and you can't borrow on it unless we can hold the market steady, and to hold the market steady is what we want with the money. It's like the dog trying to stop himself from whirling around by catching his tail, which he can't reach."

"What's to be done?"

"I'm going to try again," Barney answered, slapping on his hat. "I know two or three

more men with money who ought to be willing to do something for Rod."

"It won't work. Old Buckwalter was right; it is not business."

Barney spent the rest of the afternoon seeing those two or three men, and yet others. He left the last and walked slowly away with his hands in his pockets and his head bent, tired and disgusted.

"It 's no good," he grunted. "They are all Buckwalters. They are all business men. Poor old Rod!"

XXV

AN ARRIVAL AT TWIN MOUNTAIN

FLETCHER KEITH and Paul Rodman probably owed their lives to the length of their struggle on the car platform. When it ended with both of them going over, the train had passed the worst of the perilous stretch of track. The ravine where they fell had become shallow, and its rim was thick with mountain laurel, which broke their fall.

Keith, badly jolted, picked himself up after a little and took his bearings. He was at the mouth of the ravine, which extended, a long splotch of darkness, in the moonlight. Winding up to its entrance, and then skirting its far side, was a rough wagon road, a bare patch of which he could see here and there down the mountain slope. Fifteen feet above him, apparently resting on the tops of the laurel, the ends of the cross-ties marked the course of the railway. A few steps below him the still form of Paul Rodman was lying.

Keith went down to him, and kneeling examined the body. The heart was still beating.

"Here 's luck!" Keith said, rising. "Off here in the mountains, with the whole night before me, and a half-dead lunatic on my hands."

Keith stood and looked down at Paul doubtfully. It would be easy enough to leave him if he were dead. Ten minutes before, Keith had done his utmost to kill him; but that was a different thing from abandoning him here in his present condition.

Keith went over to the wagon road at the edge of the ravine and scanned the mountain side. It was not so bad as he had feared. There was a light plainly visible not more than half a mile down the road, and he immediately set out toward it.

He found it burning in the window of a long building with a balcony running around it. A negro was sitting on a horse-block, yelling at a dog that had been barking furiously since Keith had got within a hundred yards of the gate.

"What place is this?" Keith asked the negro.

"Dis Twin Mountain Springs, boss."

"Is there a doctor in the neighborhood?"

"Dr. Ward, he here. He live here."

Dr. Ward proved to be the lessee of the Twin Mountain Springs. The first thing that Keith learned from him was that he was not ready for guests yet, his season not opening till June; but when Keith explained that his friend was disabled from a fall among the rocks, the whole of Twin Mountain Springs was at his service; the negro was ordered to get out the wagon; and the three soon had Paul lying in one of the rooms of the long building.

Dr. Ward reported that it was not necessarily a dangerous case, unless "complications" should follow, — a few broken ribs and an ugly knock on the head. Paul was unconscious or under the influence of opiates through the night, and early next morning Keith left for the nearest railroad station, after telling the doctor who his patient was.

"I don't think he would want you to let his people know about this business, Doctor," Keith said in parting; "and my advice is that you don't do it until he wishes you to, unless, of course, his condition should become very serious."

XXVI

UNDER THE CRAGS

THE fourth week of his stay at Twin Mountain Springs had begun before Paul, on a sunny afternoon in early May, left his room and hobbled out to a bench on the wide lawn.

Dr. Ward and his family had taken good care of their solitary guest; and though the case had been more stubborn than the doctor had expected at first, he did not think it necessary to write to the address that Keith had left him. He mentioned the matter to Paul once, and so emphatic was his patient's interdiction of any communication with Louisville that the doctor never brought up the question again. "I will write all that is to be written," Paul had added. "I do not wish to be bothered by any business or friends."

"Now I 'm mighty doubtful," the doctor said afterward, in talking of this to his wife, "if the poor fellow has any friends. Certainly that one that brought him here was n't

any great shakes of a friend. And the worst of it is that he don't seem to want any friends. I 'm sure he don't care a rap whether he gets well or dies. I never see a man as far beyond interest in anything, or so cut off to himself by himself. He 's just gettin' well in spite of himself, simply because he 's got a good constitution and good blood. It 's a funny case, all around."

"I suppose he must 'a' been unfortunate in love, don't you reckon?" suggested Mrs. Ward.

"Well, maybe so, though I 'm treatin' him for broken ribs instead of broken heart. If I was supposin', I 'd say it was somethin' worse than love. I don't see how love could account for them two wanderin' around here in the mountains, without any baggage, goin' nowhere and comin' from nowhere, as far as I 've been able to make out."

"At any rate," the good lady insisted, "you can see he is a born gentleman."

"Oh, yes, he 's a gentleman. That makes it all the harder to understand. If he were a highwayman or a hobo, it would n't seem so unnatural like."

"I still believe it 's love, David; and I

would n't be surprised if the other gentleman has gone off to tell Mr. Rodman's sweetheart, so that she will be sorry and come and nurse him."

"And you 'll have it windin' up with a weddin', hey?" laughed the doctor. "But you don't shake my opinion that it 's somethin' a long way worse than any love. I 'd say that when he fell on them rocks out there he tumbled off of Mars, at least. He don't seem to belong to this world."

Paul, sunning himself on the bench this afternoon, — which was the Saturday following the Sunday of the Fluor-spar directors' meeting, — was wondering listlessly why Drewdie Poteet had not written to him about Fluor-spar affairs. Surely he had written Drewdie long ago. He remembered just what was in the short letter, what an eternity it had taken him to write it, and how he had marvelled at the peculiar phosphorescent glow of the ink as it left his pen. He remembered also, when he had handed the letter to Dr. Ward to mail, what an uncanny leer had been on the man's face. Of course he had written to Drewdie Poteet, unless — was it, or was it not? — the letter was one of those products of

his delirium which seemed so real long after his mind was clear.

Dr. Ward rode up, and dismounting came across the lawn toward Paul.

"Here! here! my hearty," he said cheerily but authoritatively; "this won't do. It's too early for you to be out here on this grass. You're just in condition to pick up a case of pneumonia now."

He took the arm of Paul, who, without objecting, walked back into the house with him.

"Doctor," he said, "I was just trying to think whether I wrote and gave you a letter soon after I came here."

"Never a letter; not a line to anybody."

Paul felt that he would have smiled at this if he had not been too tired.

"No matter," he answered; "I will write to-day."

"Here's a New York paper," the doctor said, as he left Paul in his room. "Got it from the train a little while ago. It's two or three days old, but that's fresh to us up here."

Paul wrote a brief letter to Drewdie Poteet, giving him some directions about Fluor-spar

matters and ending with the assurance that he would be in Louisville the following week, in ample time to pay off Oxnard's note.

Then he took up the newspaper, and opening it absently, saw flaring across the top of one of the columns, in heavy Gothic capitals,—

"MADGE CABANIS."

He did not start or shrink. But he was suddenly very still, and his face whitened and hardened as the insolently bold letters held his eyes.

He stared at the characters until they were merged with each other in a formless blotch, and the paper became unsteady from the very tightness with which he was clutching it.

He turned and spread the sheet on the table by his side, and leaning over, read the "pyramid" that followed. It was: —

"This Charming Young Actress Gives Up
Society to Return to the
Stage."

Paul rose slowly, rigidly, from his chair, his fist knotted, his eyes blazing.

"By — God!"

A great rage surged over him, distorting and blackening his face.

"She shall not!" he said, in a voice savage in its harshness.

He jammed on his hat and went to the door, fierce determination in his stride, as if it were but a short walk between him and Madge.

In the doorway he stopped, confronted by the wall of the mountains and the twin crags looming grimly down on him. As grim as the mountains themselves, the preposterousness of his passion also confronted him suddenly, and on the swift reaction, he leaned against the door-jamb in physical weakness.

What was Madge Cabanis to him? What did it matter now what she did? What right had he — what right did he wish — to interfere with her?

He stood there for minutes, watching the shadows deepen on the slopes of the mountains. On the surface now he was as calm as they, though a little before he had passed through some such paroxysm as that which once may have upheaved their monumental chaos.

When he went back to his seat by the table it was with firm steps. He took up the paper, and moving his chair in order to get

the best light deliberately read the item which had inspired the startling head-lines.

It was this, — one of several paragraphs in a column of stage news and gossip: —

"That Madge Cabanis will return to the boards the coming season will be welcome news to those who watched the work of this pretty and promising young actress during the two years she was with Manager Joyce. Manager Joyce is just back from the South and authorizes the announcement that he has engaged her to star in a second *Babette* company which he contemplates putting on the road in September. He is much elated at securing Miss Cabanis for the title rôle. He says she was born to play *Babette*, and he predicts that her success in it will be second only to that of Florence Falk herself. Mr. Joyce is not without some practical basis for his confidence. About a year ago Miss Cabanis played *Babette* for a week during Miss Falk's illness in Buffalo, and she undoubtedly scored a hit in that city. So pleased with her performance was Mr. Joyce that he tried to sign her last summer for a second company, but she declined in order to marry a young business and society man of Louisville. It was freely prophesied at the time that she was too much attached to the stage to remain away from it permanently. The usual result of such marriages has followed quickly, and Miss Cabanis returns to the profession of her choice with the added *éclat* of

a year of brilliant leadership in the most select circles of Southern society."

Paul laid the paper on his knee, from which it slipped, without his noting it, to the floor. He sat, motionless, looking through the open door upon the solemnity of the circling mountains. He sat, hopeless, looking quietly at the end.

And this was the end, — the end of everything that should have ended forever with him years before; the end between Madge Cabanis and himself; part of it there in the garish types of the public press, part of it here in the perpetual silence of his own undying death.

But why was not that end complete on the night he had turned from her and walked away? Why should her doings or not-doings, her goings or comings, affect him one way or another? Why should this last step of hers back into the world from which it had been his happiness to think he had delivered her, have power now to cause him another pang? It was but the public sundering of their lives, which nothing could sunder wider than the chasm that had opened between them on the night he had left her. Was he so base, so

weak, so grovelling, as to cling to her yet with a single tendril of passion or sentiment?

A great wave of rebellious tenderness and longing for her swept over him, ebbing almost instantly in stern self-resentment and self-contempt. His compressed lips parted in one stifled moan, and bending his forehead to the table he shuddered as with cold.

XXVII

BARNEY CARRUTHERS HAS HIS SAY

HE did not lift his head until heavy footsteps on the balcony outside stopped at his room. Looking up, he saw the red face of Barney Carruthers puckering at him from the doorway.

"You old hippopotamus you!" Barney grinned.

"Hullo, Barney, old man!" Paul said as he rose, lighting up for the first time in all these weeks.

They met halfway between the table and the door. If they had been women, they might have fallen on each other and wept. As it was, they clumsily locked hands for a second and looked into each other's eyes.

"Well, I be hornswoggled!" said Barney Carruthers.

"You ought to be, for coming where you are not asked!" answered Paul Rodman.

They dropped into chairs and smiled at each other like sheep. Then Barney put his feet on the table, and took out his pipe.

"Got any decent tobacco up here?" he asked. "I 'm out."

"Not a bit in the house. But Dr. Ward smokes cubebs, I believe."

"Then the first train away from these parts catches me!"

"Better try the cubebs. You 've smoked everything else."

"Thank you, I 've plenty. I was in the same room once with a cubeb smoker, and I reckon I can manage to worry along now on what I got of that smoke."

There was a pause, during which Barney hopelessly replaced his pipe in his pocket.

"What 's going on?" Paul asked. "How 's Drewdie?"

"Spending his substance in hair restoratives now. Drewdie is growing gray from the responsibility of running the Fluor-spar business."

"Why, I left everything in good shape. There was nothing but routine in sight."

"It was the things that were out of sight that have been bothering Drewdie and the rest of

us. The moles have been at work to undermine Fluor-spar since you left."

"Judd Oxnard," said Paul.

"Judd Oxnard!" bellowed Barney, pounding his thigh with his fist. "I might have known he was the man! I did half suspect it. It's not the first time he has used that *Runabout* mudscow in his schemes."

"What has he been doing through *The Runabout?*"

Barney Carruthers began rummaging in his pockets.

"Say, how are you, anyway?" he suddenly asked. "About all right again, ain't you?"

"Oh, yes, about. Was out on the lawn to-day."

"No fool necks broken, hey?"

"None, more's the pity."

"Then I reckon you can stand disagreeable news."

Paul looked the indifference he felt. Disagreeable news was of small concern to him now.

Barney gave him a copy of *The Runabout* paragraph that had caused the meeting of the Fluor-spar directors the preceding Sunday.

Paul read it, and as he refolded it his face was cast inflexibly.

"I see now that I ought to have put myself in communication with Drewdie or you. The truth is, I was not quite capable of intelligent communication with anybody the first week after I got here; and since then I frankly own that the thought of Fluor-spar has hardly entered my brain. But there's one thing certain: if people have been scared into selling their stock below par while I've been away, I'll make up every cent of the difference to them out of my own pocket, if I live long enough."

"Oh, dry up, Rod! You don't know what you're talking about."

"How low has the stock gone?"

"Well, last Saturday, a week ago to-day, it touched 105."

"And since then?"

"Monday there were a few small lots that went at par. Tuesday there were no sales reported. Wednesday one sale was made at 107. Thursday it struck 110. Yesterday, after the publication of a two-line item in a morning paper reporting that Mr. Paul Rodman was taking a short rest at Twin Moun-

tain Springs, they were bidding 120, with none on the market for less than 125. Oxnard himself was rushing around trying to buy two hundred shares at 120, but he had to pay the top notch for it."

"I think I know how Oxnard will use that stock. One hundred shares of it he has contracted to deliver next week at par; the other hundred at 90. Tell me how you stopped his raid on us."

"That 's what! You must n't think you 're the only person in Louisville that can take care of Fluor-spar in a tight squeeze."

Barney then told of his failure to find the editor of *The Runabout*. "And I have n't found him yet," he added. "The fellow heard that I was hunting him, and has been hiding out all the week. I had one interview with him years ago, and he has never liked me since."

Paul heard a full account of the directors' meeting Sunday afternoon, and of Barney's persevering and futile efforts to enlist men in his unbusiness-like scheme to guarantee the stock. "I gave it up about six o'clock Sunday evening, convinced that there was nobody in Louisville who would and could

take care of your interests while you were absent. But in less than an hour from that time I discovered I was wrong. There was somebody."

"Tom Lusk?" Paul asked.

"Tom Lusk was the first man I called on Sunday morning."

"Preston Talcott?"

"Preston Talcott not only refused, but was one of the few that took advantage of our proposition the next day to unload their stock on us at par."

"Then I could never guess."

"You ought n't to have to guess. You ought to know who has saved Paul Rodman's good name when he could n't do it himself."

"I know of no one except Drewdie and you," Paul answered, smiling at Barney's growing excitement.

"I tell you you do!"

Barney was on his feet now and glaring down fiercely at Paul.

"What do you mean, Barney?"

Barney raised his arm, and with his most impassioned jury gesture brought his fist down with a blow upon the palm of his hand.

"I mean Paul Rodman's wife!"

It was as if the blow, instead of falling on Barney's palm, had fallen on Paul's face. Every tinge of blood fled from it.

"Stop!" he said, making a quick motion to rise.

"You stop!"

Barney's command instantly followed Paul's, and his hand was on Paul's shoulder, pushing him firmly back into the chair.

"I 've got the floor now, Rod," he added, lapsing at once from his jury manner into his customary grinning chaff. "Let me finish; then you can have your turn and throw as many fits as you feel like. You see," taking a seat on the table, and getting a purchase on his raised knee with his clasped hands, "I was just back from New York last Sunday, where I 'd gone looking for you. She had sent for me a week before and told me enough about a quarrel between you two to show me that she was frightened out of her wits about you, — seemed to fear you could n't come back, or would n't if you could. I knew you well enough to be pretty sure that you had gone off to make a fool of yourself; so I started after you, to try to trail you, or some remnant of you. Sunday, after I had

got back to Louisville, and after I had failed at everything else that day, I went to the hotel to let her know what progress I had made in my hunt for you."

Paul was now sitting with his elbow on the arm of his chair, his head resting against the hand that covered his eyes. He made no comment or sign as Barney rambled on.

"That first time I saw her — when she sent for me — she was looking so worn out and broken up and so pitifully proud, too, that I felt if I could only lay my hands on you, *I* would n't leave a remnant of you; but when I saw her Sunday evening she was different. She was even more worn out, but she was stirred up about that *Runabout* stuff. Somebody — some kind lady in the hotel — had taken pains to show her the sheet; and, after all, I believe it was the best thing for her. It woke her up and gave her something to do. She was set on stopping such attacks on you and your business; and when I told her what Drewdie and I had been trying to do all day to stop them, she said that my plan, if I thought it was the best plan, had to go through. She would put it through herself. And she did, before I could make up my

mind whether I was dreaming or drunk. Oh, I tell you, she's fine; she's a — she's a rose of Sharon, Rod!"

Barney shifted his hands to his other knee, and after giving Paul time to show some sign of life, went on: —

"You never would guess how she did it, though. You see, it was this way. That theatre man, Joyce, was in town with one of his shows, and it seems had tried to get her to go back on the stage. She had refused outright, but when she understood what I wanted to do about Fluor-spar she sent at once for Joyce and told him that if he would stand by me she would accept his offer."

"You didn't consent to any such folly?" asked Paul, with repressed ferocity, at last looking up.

"Didn't I? Did the hungry duck you've read about consent to the June-bug? And talk about business men! Well, as Drewdie Poteet says, that Joyce could get left at the post and lose your Louisville business friends in the first quarter. By twelve o'clock that night he had gone over the books with an expert, had decided that he would put up for

all the stock offered next day at par, and was off to take a look at the mines. Monday morning I had a small advertisement in the papers bidding, in the name of Gaynor & Clay, par for Fluor-spar stock. A few driblets, as I told you, were turned in on us, but the beauty of it was that Oxnard himself suspected that we were bluffing and tried to make us run by letting loose on us all he held, — which explains his buying it back yesterday at 125.

"Joyce showed up again Monday night, and was so well satisfied that he not only was willing to let the advertisement run on, but almost as good as agreed, before he left for New York, to pay that note of Oxnard's and take over the mortgage, unless other arrangements were made by the time it fell due. But no more stock came in at par; and after Thursday night, when I learned where you were and had that little 'personal' about you put in the paper, there was none to be had under 125. So you see it ain't your business men that know all there is to be known about business. We outsiders can give them pointers sometimes."

Paul got up, and laying his hand on

Barney's shoulder, said in a voice uneven with deep feeling: —

"Barney, no man ever had a better friend than I have in you, and I 'm not going to try to thank you, because words are poor and useless between you and me. But I am sorry that the matter could not have been arranged without bringing — Mrs. Rodman into it."

"I 'm not; and neither would you be if you could have seen the good it did her to be able to save the day for you. Besides, she won't have to carry out her bargain to go back to play-acting. I made it a condition with Joyce that he was to release her if you returned and did n't approve, and paid him back what he had put up for Fluor-spar. But you won't have to bother about that. He 's got a plump profit on the stock we took in Monday. Drewdie and I were in the pool also; but as we did n't amount to anything without Joyce, we are going to leave him all the winnings."

"Barney," Paul said, with an evidently desperately determined effort, "I owe you something more than the silence I shall maintain with every one else. I don't know how much she told you of what you called our quarrel; but I must say to you now — I shall never

speak of it after this — that there is no one I shall ever again call wife."

Barney Carruthers slid slowly off the table, and taking Paul by the arm led him to the lounge, with a slight roughness which might have been misunderstood by one who did not know the two men well.

"You come here and lie down, Rod," he ordered. "You are tired out; you 've been up too long."

Paul did not resist. He half sat, half lay on the lounge, his eyes partially closed in weariness. Barney Carruthers drew up one of the split-bottomed chairs, and setting his foot on it rested his elbow on his knee.

"Now look here, Rod, it 's my say this time. And I do say that considering how long and closely you 've been hobnobbing with me, there 's no excuse for your knowing so little about women; there 's no excuse for your not knowing that good women are the best things going, and that good women are the rule, and the other kind the exception. And you know perfectly well — you know it this minute, down to your very marrow — that there ain't a better woman on earth or in heaven than your wife. You know that if

you have thought for an instant that she ever did you a conscious wrong, it was you that wronged her, and wronged her outrageously. And now, Mr. Paul Rodman, I want to give you fair warning, that hereafter if it ever gets into my head that you have a ghost of a doubt that Mrs. Paul Rodman is a thousand times too good for any man who ever lived, then I 'll break you into so many pieces that your Dr. Ward and all his tribe could n't tell whether you had been a man or a monkey."

Paul opened his eyes with an indulgent smile.

"All right, Barney," he said; "we 'll never talk of women."

"Yes, we will talk of women. We won't talk of anything else, if I choose. I 've got to make up a lot of lost opportunity if I teach you anything about women in time to do you any good in this life."

Barney Carruthers shoved the chair aside and took an envelope from his pocket.

"Here, you can read this while I look around and try a drink out of the Twin Mountain Springs. It 's from a man who put me on the track of you."

Barney tossed him the letter and left the

room. Paul glanced at the unfamiliar superscription, and opened the envelope.

"Say," said Barney Carruthers, returning along the balcony, and poking his head through the door, "where could a fellow corral that doctor of yours? I reckon I 'll have to go up against his cubebs."

XXVIII

DR. WARD LOSES A PATIENT

PAUL found that the envelope contained a note, and within that, another envelope. He read the note slowly: —

LOUISVILLE, May 9.

PAUL RODMAN, ESQ., TWIN MOUNTAIN SPRINGS.

SIR, — Mr. Carruthers has consented to be the bearer of the enclosed letter to you, which otherwise I should have delivered in person. In the short interview you had with me, just before we left for the mountains last month, I attempted to tell you that Mrs. Rodman was in no way involved to her discredit in the affair which provoked that interview; but you would not listen to me. That was your privilege. You proposed to hold me to account, not for the misdoings of others, but of myself. But as soon as I had the chance I resolved — not because I owed it to you, but to Mrs. Rodman — to show you that I alone was to blame. On the night of your wretched mistake, as I was passing Mrs. Rodman's apartments, hearing her at the piano, I was bold enough, with the help of the champagne I had drunk, to enter. I was immediately and in-

dignantly ordered out, and in obeying that order I was again bold enough to announce that I would be happy to return at any time I should hear Mrs. Rodman playing that particular selection. As I went out I saw Mrs. Oxnard leaving the door. The part that she took a few seconds later is fully within your knowledge.

This is the whole truth, and you know it, — not because I tell it, or Mrs. Oxnard confirms it, but because you know that any construction of that night's occurrences that reflects on Mrs. Rodman is bound to be false.

Very truly yours,

FLETCHER KEITH.

Paul seemed no longer to breathe as he held the letter in his hand, staring with dead eyes at nothingness.

Finally, as a breeze stirred through the door and whipped the sheet of paper from his relaxed fingers, he turned mechanically to the other envelope and read: —

LONDON, April 27.

DEAR PAUL, — So you really did ask Madge to play the *Berceuse!* Do you know, I waited at the head of the stairs for fully ten minutes that night and finally left dreadfully disappointed because you did not appear to have thought enough of my word to act on my warning. But it seems to have resulted

most successfully, after all; and Fletcher Keith has followed me across the Atlantic to get me to tell you the true story of it. You always did so exaggerate trifles, Paul! When I met you on the stairs I had just heard your Madge ordering Fletcher from the room, and Fletcher inviting himself to return whenever she played the *Berceuse*— so like Fletch, was n't it? That was the bald fact; the version I gave you was the flower of an artistic imagination and of an old and *peculiar* friendship. I am perfectly willing now to give you the bald fact; for knowing you as I do, you dear old silly-billy, I know that it will go a thousand times harder with you when it breaks on you that you have so horribly insulted Madge Innocent than it would if you should continue to believe that you had only resented the wickedness of Madge Indiscreet. And I fear it will go harder still when you realize that it remained for such a man as Fletcher to convince you that you had thus insulted her.

And now, my dear Paul, let us play quits, and when we meet again let it be with a clean score on either side, that we may make a new beginning to a new friendship.

Faithfully yours,

LUCY ARNAN OXNARD.

Science says that probably the greatest physical agony one can suffer is that which results from the spasmodic clutch of the heart

by a certain disease of that organ, and surely this is credible to those who have seen the face of such a sufferer even long after the pain itself has passed. Such was Paul's face as he raised himself stiffly, and sitting on the side of the lounge, slowly and methodically tore the two letters into small bits.

Then he got up, put on his hat, and glancing around the room, as a preoccupied man starting on a journey sometimes glances in a sightless precaution against overlooking anything he would take with him, went out and closed the door after him.

Barney Carruthers and Dr. Ward were in "the office," laughing and smoking cubebs; but it was with suddenly serious countenances that they sprang from their chairs as Paul entered.

"When does the first train pass for Louisville?" Paul asked authoritatively.

"What are you doin' here, Rodman?" sharply demanded the doctor. "You ought to be in bed!"

"I am going to Louisville. Please order me a conveyance."

"You are foolish. You are in no condition to travel, and you won't be for a week yet.

Besides, the train goes by in less than an hour, and it would take dangerously hard drivin' to make it."

"It must be done. Please don't lose any time." Paul passed out to the front platform. "Here is a buckboard now. This will do."

"It 's foolhardy!" the doctor said to Barney Carruthers; "we must not allow him to do it. It may kill him."

"We 'd have to kill him to keep him here now, Doctor. I know him."

The buckboard had brought Barney from the station, and the driver was hanging around the kitchen, waiting for the supper hour. Paul was already untying the hitching rein as the doctor and Barney came out on the platform.

Paul was about to get into the vehicle when he abruptly returned to the platform and handed his pocket-book to Barney, requesting, —

"Please settle with the doctor, Barney, while I say good-bye to Mrs. Ward."

He was back almost immediately, and the buckboard rattled away with him, while the doctor gazed after him with puzzled, disapproving visage, and Mrs. Ward waved her

handkerchief to his back when she was not dabbing it to her eyes.

It was, indeed, a hard drive over the rough mountain road, and Barney Carruthers soon slipped his arm around Paul, to prevent his being pitched from the wagon.

"We don't want any rebroken ribs to-day," he laughed awkwardly.

Neither spoke but once after that during the drive. At a smooth stretch of the road Barney said, —

"Did I tell you that she's not in Louisville now? She left for Tennessee this week, to try to get a little rest, and I reckon to get out of reach of the gabbling geese at the hotel."

Paul's expression did not change.

"It's all the same," he replied. "Go on faster," he ordered the driver.

XXIX

A RACE SOUTHWARD

THEY caught the train; and all that night Paul lay in his berth, looking out into the brilliant solemnity of the mountain sky. His one impelling thought was to see Madge again, not to undo the wrong he had put upon her, — that could never be undone, — but to ameliorate as far as possible its effect on her by confessing its infamy and abasing himself in contrition and remorse for the unspeakable outrage she had suffered through him. It was for her, not for himself, that he was now concerned. His own hideous guilt was a thing that could not be recalled or eradicated. Nor could it be modified by repentance, however poignant. Perhaps he might thus help to heal partially the wound his brutality had inflicted on her, but nothing could lessen the brutality of the blow itself. One who falls from man's estate, as he had done, in committing the supreme sin against wifehood, falls forever. There is no

return to the place which he has forfeited. The woman may reach out her hand to him in generous pity, but it is to the penitent weakling, — never again to the strong man who once held her respect with her love. Her compassionate lips may forgive him, but the true wife in her cannot forgive, because his is the one crime which the true wife cannot forgive and still exist. It was not forgiveness that Paul expected to ask; it was atonement, as far as was in his power, that he was anxious to make.

Such was his mental chaos through which, all that night, he looked out at the mountain stars, the one recurring and consistent strain being in the nature of an unformed prayer to those infinite spaces that nothing should happen to her or to him to prevent his poor atonement.

The train dragged through a long day, held back, it seemed to Paul in his tense impatience, by the interminable commonplace incidents of the journey, — the waiting on the switches; the loafing at the water-tanks; the stops at the countless way-stations, with the leisurely exchange of baggage and mail-pouches, the complaisance of the trainmen, the stolid equability of the rural onlookers, the chatter and flurry

of the local travellers, the extravagance of their partings and greetings, and the portentousness of their little goings and comings.

Night again found him in Louisville, but with hours to wait before the departure of the train which was to take him to Tennessee. When he left the hotel for the station at two o'clock that morning, Barney Carruthers followed him into the carriage.

"No, no, Barney!" he protested. "Get out and go to bed. There is nothing you can do for me at the train, and I'm fully able to look after myself now."

"I'm not going to worry looking after you specially, Rod. I just thought this would be a good time to run down to Tennessee myself."

"No! you must not. I won't allow it!"

"You won't? Refuse to let a man go to see his own dad? How do you expect to manage it? Have you chartered the whole train?"

Paul looked at him a moment with an expression which was lost in the imperfect light.

"Barney," he said, "you are the finest old fool you and I know."

Barney whistled a "rag-time" bar before he replied, —

"But I ain't the biggest one we know."

It was then that Paul, for the first time since reading the letters Barney had brought him, voluntarily spoke of Madge.

"Do you think, Barney," he said uncertainly, "it is possible, after all that has happened, that she will, that she can, even see me?"

"Rod, if you had asked me such a question a long time ago, when I used to call you Polly, I'd have said it was you through and through. But I supposed you'd got over all that moonshine about woman being such a superior being to man that the laws of common-sense can't reach from one to the other. It's common sense to say that when a husband and wife have a misunderstanding and the one who is to blame is sorry and is anxious to confess it, that is just what the other is most anxious shall be done. I ain't going to waste time thinking what would happen on any fine-spun theory that takes no account of common-sense."

Paul knew it was useless to discuss such a point with Barney Carruthers, and he said no more.

Only once afterward did he allude to it even indirectly.

It was on the train between Louisville and Nashville. As day broke, a halt was made at

a little station in the fields, and Paul, looking through the window of his berth at the kindling eastern sky, saw darkly silhouetted against it the form of a man, with twisted neck and projecting tongue, hanging by a rope to a limb of a tree.

"When did that happen?" he heard the conductor outside ask of a half-dozen farm-hands who were standing off gaping at the body.

"Las' night," one of them replied. "The sher'ff tried to git him on the train, but the mob got here 'fo' the train did."

"The usual trouble?" inquired the conductor, with subdued excitement.

"Yes. Jeff Turner's wife."

Later Barney Carruthers, facing Paul on the opposite seat, asked, with a touch of awe in his voice, —

"Did you see it, back there, — that tree?"

"Yes."

"The thing's taken away my appetite for breakfast."

Paul was silent for a long time. Then he said, in a dull monotone, —

"In this country they lynch brutish louts for certain crimes against women. There are far

blacker crimes of men against their own wives, and yet you say that these are the crimes that can be glossed over by common-sense."

Barney Carruthers did not answer. His gaze lingered on the stalwart form of his friend, grown gaunt, the sunken cheeks, the deep anguish of the long-sleepless eyes. Then Barney saw something outside that demanded his attention, and putting his head through the window he plunged his nose sonorously into his handkerchief.

XXX

"NO LONGER A DREAM"

THAT afternoon Cousin Jo Cabanis, sitting on his veranda steps, hailed Aunt Viny as she was grunting her way across the yard, with a hatchet in her hand.

"Hi-yo, Aunt Viny! Where you travellin' to now?"

The old woman stopped and turned toward him.

"Who, me?" she said. "I des gwine down to de branch to git me some red-oak bark. I feels de need er some bitters powerful bad. But I ain't trabblin'. I let you know I done trabblin', Mahs Jo, sence I went up to dat Chicawger. Yere I is, en yere I gwine stay."

"You don't seem to like Chicago so mighty much, Aunt Viny."

"Lawd, Mahs Jo! ain't I done tole you dat?"

She had, several times in the last few days; but Cousin Jo never tired hearing about it, and

she never tired telling about it. She had recently made a long-planned journey to Chicago, to visit a son, and "Yere I is, en yere I gwine stay," was her reiterated assurance since her return.

"Well," Cousin Jo mused, "everybody says Chicago is a fine, big city, Aunt Viny, — one of the finest in the world, — and I don't just see what you can have against it."

"Who, me?" coming nearer, her eyes snapping. "I ain't got nothin' agin Chicawger. Hit 's de people."

"What 's the matter with the people?"

"Now listen at you, Mahs Jo! You knows whut ails dem people des well ez me. Dey ain't our kinder folks, da 's whut ails um. I wan't fotch up wid no sich!"

"So you would n't like to live there?"

"I be boun' I 'd come a heap nigher dyin' dah den livin' dah. My land! I skeert mighty nigh to def ev'y time I set my foot outer do's, whut wid de ships a-sailin' spang thoo de streets, en de bridges a-swingin' fus one way en den t'other, right out fum under you. En ef you don't git knocked down en tromped on by de scrougin' people, fus thing you know dem stree' cyars gwiner run over you 'fo' you

knows whut happened to you. Clang! whang! dey comes, dis side er you en dat side er you, a-chargin' along, widout no hawses er nothin' else to pull um. Hit 's des scan'lous, da 's whut! Some folks says dey 'low some er dem cyars is worked by somepn up above, en some is worked by somepn under de groun', en I says I be boun' dey is, en somepn whut 's got hawns en hoofs, en smells er brimstone, to boot. I allus did 'low Ole Scratch made his stompin' groun' in dese yere big cities, anyhow. En den de ca'iges whut dem white folks keeps, Mahs Jo — some un um ain't got but two wheels, wid de driver a-squattin' peeked way up on de hine seat, caze dey too stingy to have a front seat, I reckon. Dey ain't no use talkin', Mahs Jo, folks whut tries to put on ez many airs ez dem folks does en den goes scrimpin' 'roun' in ca'iges wid two wheels — you knows whut ails dem, Mahs Jo: dey ain't our kinder white folks, en I don't keer who hear me say so!"

"You reckon that 's what 's the trouble with 'em, Aunt Viny?"

"Co'se it is! Whut de use er yo' gwine on dat away, Mahs Jo Cabanis? Goodness' sakes! it don't tek no two wheels fer to show dat!

You kin see dey ain't our kinder white folks soon 's you lays eyes on dey drivers — white drivers, mos' all un um, Mahs Jo; en you knows dey ain't no reel quality gwiner keep no po' white trash ca'ige drivers, stiddier niggers — you knows dat des well ez me, Mahs Jo!"

"Then I take it that you are not overly satisfied with your trip to Chicago, Aunt Viny?"

"Oh, Ize satisfied 'nough. Ef I had n't 'a' gone to Chicawger I would n't 'a' stop, comin' back, to see Miss Madge, en ef I had n't 'a' stop to see her I would n't 'a' fotch her home wid me, en she 'd 'a' been mopin' up in dat Kintucky dis blessed minute. Say, Mahs Jo, I don't lak dis yere way Mr. Paul got traipsin' 'roun' de country on business en leavin' honey behine so lonesome she lak to cry her eyes out de minute she see me come thoo dat do' er hern. Ef I 'd 'a' knowed he ca'ied on dat kinder business when he come 'roun' yere co'tin', I 'd 'a' sot my foot down en ferbid de bon's."

Aunt Viny, pursuing her way in search of the red-oak bark, had gone but a little distance beyond the gate when she met Barney Carruthers and Paul Rodman driving up in a buggy.

"Bless de lamb!" she said, stopping in the middle of the road. "Ef 't ain't Mr. Paul and Mr. Barney!"

To Paul's immediate inquiry she answered:

"Miss Madge, she gone to tek a walk, I reckon." Then her body writhed with her spasmodic, musical laugh. "Law, Mr. Paul, I been layin' off to give you a good bastin' down fer de way you been gallivantin' 'roun widout Miss Madge, but I reckon you don't need it. You sutny do look lak you ain't stood it no better 'n her."

"Where is she? Which way did she go?" Paul demanded.

"I seed her gwine over yander, into de Valley."

Paul sprang from the buggy.

"Will you drive on to the house, Barney?" he said, and struck rapidly into the path to the creek.

He crossed it, with swift, steady stride, into Division Valley. All his strength seemed to have returned suddenly. He plunged on, oblivious of the beauty of May in the Valley. He was deaf to the rush and ripple of the stream, the calls of the birds; he was blind to the foliage's maze of myriad greens, shot with

the delicate whites and blues of the blossoms underfoot and the delicate whites and blues of the sky overhead; he was insensible to the evanescent aromas from bough and sod, rarer than the breath of rose leaves in old cabinets, more insidious than memories of wild honey. His senses were alive for the sight of one figure, the sound of one voice. Beyond the creek, past the bluff where the wild roses were budding, he slashed on till the elm of the crow's nest was in view. If Madge were in the Valley, and if she were here, where they had met and where their walks together had always ended thereafter, — there was a thunderous turbulence in his blood, a mighty ebb and flow at the thought of it; and then there was a succession of sharp yelps, as a lithe form bounded through the bushes, and Piff leaped jubilantly upon him.

A few yards more, a turn of the path through the bushes, and Paul stopped short as he saw Madge, standing under the beech where he had lain in wait for the squirrels. Her attitude was alert, her intent face was toward him; and as he came into view and halted ten paces away, she uttered a quick, faint cry and ran forward two or three steps,

but instantly checked herself, her outstretched hands falling beside her.

As Paul looked into the startled, questioning eyes fastened on him, as he beheld the face so pathetically pale and worn, and the slight figure yet inclining toward him in its arrested impulse, he summoned all his powers of self-control, lest he forget himself in a whelming desire to rush up to her and take her into his arms, which no longer had a right to hold her.

With a determined effort at calmness, he walked forward and paused a few feet from her.

"Will you — will you let me speak to you a moment?" he said in a low voice.

Her eyes had fallen as he stopped near her, but she raised them again searchingly. She came up to him and laid her hands upon his arm, and with her face lifted to his she almost sobbed, —

"Oh, Paul, you have been ill!"

She bowed her head against him, he felt to hide her swift tears, and he bent over to kiss her hair, but remembered and drew back, standing erect again. He had not expected any such reception as this, and it only intensi-

fied the more, if possible, his unworthiness in his own eyes.

"I — it is very good of you to see me at all," he finally said.

She led him to the foot of the beech-tree.

"Come," she urged him. "You look so tired, and you must rest before we go back to the house."

She sat down on the great twisted root of the beech, and made room beside her for him; but he remained standing, and looked down on her as he leaned against the tree.

"I did not come," he said, after a little, "to beg your forgiveness for the cowardly wrong I did you, although you would be justified in thinking I am base enough even for that. I wish only to confess to you my shame and humiliation, and to ask you — it is all I ask you — to believe me when I say that even you cannot hold me in the supreme contempt that I hold myself."

She made no reply, nor any movement except that her head drooped a little lower.

"I should like to tell you," he went on, "more of my past than you know — not with any idea of trying to palliate my conduct to you — I hope you will believe I recognize that

there can be no palliation of that — but in order that you may realize, if you can, for your own sake, how it was possible for a human being to be capable of so atrocious an insult to you, of all women."

"Won't you sit down?" she said gently, without looking up.

He paid no attention to this, but told her, as briefly as he could, of his experience with Lucy Arnan and the effect it had left on him. "That is all I have to say," he finished, "except to thank you for allowing me to say it."

Her hand sought his, which she pressed against her cheek; then she looked up at him with a face so full of blooming, tearful love that he trembled weakly against the supporting tree.

"Oh, Paul, I am so sorry for all you have suffered! But I can't feel very hard toward that poor woman; for if she had taken you, what would have become of me?"

She smiled up at him bravely, and he, the words throbbing in his throat, spoke with impetuous bewilderment, —

"Surely — it can't be — that you are forgiving me!"

"I 'm not thinking of such disagreeable

things as forgiveness. I just know that I never was so happy, and I don't care for anything else that ever has been."

She drew him down to the seat by her side, and as the rapturous light broke over his still puzzled face he stammered, —

"I don't see how it is possible for a woman like you —"

Blushing and smiling as if she had never known a tear, she put her hand over his lips.

"We don't know and we don't care anything about women," she said. "We just know that we have each other, and that we don't care for anything else."

He laughed with his old boyishness, and kissed her. But even then he did it more as if he were kissing a saint than his wife.

They sat long at the foot of the beech-tree, and said fitfully the many things they had to say to each other. When at last they rose, Madge laughed, —

"Oh! there is something else, Paul. You must write to dear old Mr. Joyce at once and tell him you cannot ratify his contract with me."

"Poor Joyce! But he has fared pretty well, Barney tells me; and I suppose he would be

willing to play the same part again on the same conditions."

As they turned to leave, Paul paused and looked at the letters carved long ago in the smooth bark of the beech.

"Madge," he said, "when we come here again I must tell you the beautiful dream I had just before I cut my initials there and left the blank space for — yours."

"Oh, you must!" she cried. "We will come again to-morrow."

"Only it is no longer a dream, dear. It is —" he drew her to him and kissed her, this time not as a saint, but as Madge — "it is, like all other things that once were my dreams, you."

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